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# GANDHI'S EMISSARY



SUDHIR GHOSH

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# GANDHI'S EMISSARY



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TO  
SHANTI AND THE TWO GIRLS,  
SUNANDA AND SUPRIYA



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The Author

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*Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth  
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,  
Of all! the unhealthy and O'er-darkened ways  
Made for our searching; yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirits.*

JOHN KEATS in *Endymion*

## *Introduction*

**T**HE STORY of what really happened between Gandhiji and the British Labour Government in 1945-7, about the transfer of power to India, has not yet been told. Political and constitutional history has been written. But that is not the purpose of this book. Why Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence, at moments of crisis in the India-Britain negotiations, chose to meet Gandhiji secretly in the garden at the back of the Viceroy's House in New Delhi without the knowledge either of the British Viceroy or of the Indian political leaders in a struggle to hand over power to an undivided India is, I see now many years later, a poignant as well as a dramatic story.

I have often been told by my friends in India, Britain and the United States that I owe it to them to write up my part of the Gandhi story. They have pointed out to me on many occasions that if one's life touches greatness at any point it is a duty to one's fellow men to report on it. I should have written this report some years ago, but I have suffered from mental lethargy. I have also hesitated to write a personal account of those years, because the story is likely to sound somewhat egotistical to some and to cause a certain amount of controversy. But the weightier consideration is that if I do not write this account of what happened in those amazing years a legitimate part of the recent history of India will be lost.

Gandhiji had a number of people around him to work for him. He had a habit of using different people for different jobs. He had his own idea on who was suitable for which part of his work and his choices were seldom obvious. His judgement was usually more intuitive than logical.

For his negotiations with the British Labour Government for the transfer of power during 1945-7 he chose, for reasons of his own, to use me as his young emissary, ignoring the logical

protests of others. I was thus at the centre of the discussions and negotiations that ultimately led to the division of India into two separate sovereign States, with disastrous consequences for the sub-continent not for mere decades but perhaps for centuries to come. This perhaps is the true portent of the recent India-Pakistan war. It is useful to have a retrospective look at what happened, twenty years ago, and how it happened.

There were four principal personalities in the India-Britain human drama: Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Stafford Cripps, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. I am not interested in adulation of any of these personalities. I loved Gandhi but I was not an acolyte. To sentimentalize over Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence is not my purpose; nor to refute it. I knew him as a very human man who was quite capable of committing human blunders in negotiations. Even more thoroughly I knew him to be a man of divine courage. Gandhi demonstrated in his life a range of courage surpassing any scale of human values. His philosophy of non-violence caused a ripple of hope in the world but that was not what made him immortal. It was the blazing flame of courage which he left behind as his legacy. On a point which was his *swadharma* (self-law) he was unshakeable. The way he left the politics of Indian independence, in October 1946, and went down to the interior villages of East Bengal to be in the midst of frightened men and women who, as a result of communal violence, had lost all sense of security, showed the world the real Gandhi—driven inevitably to loneliness, walking barefooted from village to village, at the age of seventy-seven, singing Tagore's song of poignant isolation: 'If they answer not thy call, then walk alone; if they do not hold up their lamps when the night is troubled with raging storm, then with the thunder-flame of thy pain ignite thine own heart and let it burn alone.' When we celebrated Indian Independence on the 15th August 1947 Gandhi said it was for him a day of mourning.

To many, Stafford Cripps was a frosty intellectual. But those who really knew him understood that this deeply religious man of transcendent ability symbolized the best that India inherited from Britain. This heritage and men like Cripps who bestowed

it, left behind in the hearts of Indians that enduring affection for the British people, their language and culture, which survived the thirty years' struggle of India to remove herself, at once foundation and keystone, from the British Empire. The skill, the wisdom, the operational efficiency of the British collective being have permeated the Indian being and will be eternally present in India's soul. That is our British inheritance. That, too, was a gift of the divine—to the process of evolution of India's integrated personality.

To opponents, and indeed to many a bewildered and withered colleague, Nehru was the patrician, the arrogant aristocrat. Like hunger for food perhaps anger is the best sauce for high politics. In any case, his temper was ancillary. Centrally and critically Nehru represented the twentieth century in India, and called upon his people to enter it. It is true that he projected his self-esteem on to the psyche of India, occasionally even presenting the one as the other. This, too, was secondary. Above all he loved India with a rare passion and India returned that love in cascading abundance. He was India's pledge to her own future unity and final synthesis. I have not come lately, by way of fashionable eulogy, to these views, nor have they been diminished by the growing awareness of Jawaharlal Nehru's grave errors at, and after, the partition of India. An intimate account of Nehru's role, if it is to be human, cannot but include his errors or, more precisely, my conviction—supported now by twenty years' hindsight—that he erred in the proceedings which shape my narrative.

Gandhi made India free from foreign rule but Nehru was the creator of India's secular constitution and the founding father of parliamentary democracy in India. To create a genuine Parliament through a General Election by 220 million registered voters, free from any occasion for serious complaint by any political party, is an impressive feat. I have watched this mercurial person sitting through a whole day of boring debate on foreign affairs in which Member after Member stood up and indulged in endless banalities about non-alignment and co-existence. He often talked about the majesty of Parliament. He earned his right to speak thus of Parliament.



To many Vallabhbhai Patel was the prototype of a right-wing politician, friend, agent and instrument of the capitalists. This is a shoddy label and a caricature of a great practical statesman. He was tough and he liked to conserve. Such 'conservatives' are geniuses of the possible, masters of pragmatic solutions. His practicality, his lack of interest in the dogmas of socialism and capitalism, made him at one temperamentally, with Cripps, the Socialist. He was a doer, a great administrator; he made a magnificent job of the integration of more than 600 princely states with India. And the doer in him was not produced by the West but by Mother India.

Each of these four men personified, indeed lived out, archetypal qualities. My story throws some light on those qualities and I present it because I lived it; delighted in it; and am still fascinated by it. All Indian history, great impulses of her spiritual tradition, grave omens of division and dissolution and an imperishable inner strength, were all revealed in these climacteric years.

Is India going to survive as a parliamentary democracy? Or is the present régime going to be replaced, in the not too distant future, by some form of totalitarian government? After all there is no built-in guarantee in a parliamentary democracy for its continued existence. I asked H. N. Brailsford, a devoted friend of India, a short time before his death in 1958, what he thought was going to happen to India. Noel Brailsford, a wise man, and a veteran observer of world events, said, 'Well, Sudhir, after Jawaharlal I think India will go Communist. There seems to be no escape from it.' I have often wondered if he was right. India's population has risen from 350 million to 470 million in the eighteen years of Independence. It is increasing at the rate of about fifteen million per year and will be 550 million in another five years. At the present rate of growth by 1984 India's population will be nearly 1,000 million. Is it possible for India to feed this passionate proliferation of man, let alone provide it with a reasonable standard of living?

Aldous Huxley pointed out in the last book he wrote that Lenin used to say that electricity plus socialism equals com-

munism; but the equation in the underdeveloped countries is somewhat different; in the underdeveloped countries electricity minus heavy industry plus birth control equals democracy and plenty; electricity plus heavy industry minus birth-control equals misery, totalitarianism and ultimately war. Huxley added that this was an entirely foreseeable tragedy but the leaders of the underdeveloped countries were walking into this trap with their eyes wide open.

Is it possible to find a solution for these enormous agricultural and industrial problems of India within the limitations of a parliamentary process? Or is a parliamentary government going to be swept off its feet by the magnitude of these unsolved problems? Maybe this is what Noel Brailsford had in mind when he made his pessimistic remark about what was likely to happen in post-Nehru India. But I remain an optimist. Nobody who has lived close to Gandhi could fail to learn that India itself was a lesson and, no matter what outside influence she absorbed, she always answered the questions she posed.

As an individual Indian I, too, seek these answers. I was Gandhi's emissary and the momentum of his trust and confidence propelled me into two decades of public service in each of the areas of challenge confronting India. I have worked, in leading positions, in the integration of the princely States, the resettlement of refugees, the construction from zero of the now burgeoning industrial city of Faridabad, in the Punjab, which was one of the two pioneering projects for community development in India, the creation of India's steel complex, and today I work for the restoration of agricultural potential in the fields of my own district, Purulia, in West Bengal. Since the invasion of India by Communist China in October–November 1962, I have been a Gandhian emissary once again in the capitals of the two super powers. With Nehru's moral support I made, as a Member of the Indian Parliament, fascinating explorations in Moscow and Washington, thrice in 1963–4, in search of peace between India and Pakistan and the possibility of a non-military diplomatic settlement of the problem of India–China confrontation. For there is no military solution of that problem.

I have moved in these years from Gandhiji to Sri Aurobindo. These years have stretched my faith as well as my experience. They have led me gradually and inevitably from the inspiration of Gandhi, perhaps the greatest spiritual genius of India since the Buddha, to Sri Aurobindo, the logical conclusion of India's long struggle to express her inner riches in outer life.

SUDHIR GHOSH

NEW DELHI

*Republic Day,*

*26th January, 1966*

*PART ONE*

**GANDHI'S EMISSARY**



## CHAPTER ONE

### *A Famous Loss of Temper*

A SENIOR civil servant of the old India office in Whitehall who used to work with the Secretary of State, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, bitterly remarked to a well-known British Quaker friend of Mahatma Gandhi in the summer of 1947 that I was responsible for the dismissal of the Viceroy, Lord Wavell. I did not believe that I deserved this dubious compliment but thereby hangs a tale of modern Indian history.

The history of over a century of Britain's colonial rule in India was a history of divide and rule. The record of dividing the Hindus and Muslims in India by all sorts of means, subtle as well as crude, is nothing that Britain need be proud of. But it is not commonly realized that Britain did not divide India into two separate Sovereign States; the decision to divide India was made by Indian leaders against the will of Gandhiji and the British Labour Government. It is difficult to point out any perfidy Albion committed in India since 1945 when a new class of British leaders, including Stafford Cripps, came to power under the leadership of Attlee, after the landslide victory of the Labour Party that summer.

Six months after they assumed office the Attlee Government sent out to India an all-Party Parliamentary delegation under a Welsh M.P., Professor Richards, a man of no particular distinction. But the delegation included some of the young Labour Party live wires such as Arthur Bottomley, who later became Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, and Woodrow Wyatt and old-timers like Reginald Sorensen, to become Lord Sorensen (incongruous for so modest a man). There were young Conservatives like Toby Low, the future Lord Aldington (most appropriate), and the Earl of Munster

who was for some time Parliamentary Under Secretary in the India Office. The job given to this mixed bag of British M.P.s was to move about freely in India and to gather as much information as they could, mainly through informal meetings with Indian politicians of all shades of political opinion, to test the temper of the Indian political parties and the state of things in India after the long years of the war.

The British Parliamentary delegation caught up with Gandhiji in Madras in January 1946. After his visit to Bengal and Assam in December 1945 and January 1946 Gandhiji proceeded from Calcutta to Madras to attend the Silver Jubilee of Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha. Propagation of Hindi as a national language for the unification of India had a special place in Gandhiji's heart. So in order to give his support to the Hindi movement in South India, he travelled all the way to Madras from Calcutta instead of returning to Sevagram, his *Ashram* in Central India, and to some well-earned rest after two months' strenuous visit to the interior villages of Bengal and Assam. The Parliamentary delegation was at that moment in Madras, according to a programme prepared for them by the Viceroy, and they were staying at Government House, Guindy. They were naturally anxious to meet Gandhiji and this was a suitable opportunity. One evening they had a long session with Gandhiji reviewing the whole Indian scene. The Labour Members of the delegation said that they were dissatisfied with the itinerary prepared for them by the Viceroy. It took them into the usual ruts of Indian politics of a communal character. They wanted to get out of the ruts and to be free to meet individually or in groups many people in the public life of the country who could give them an insight into what was really happening in India.

So at the end of the session with Gandhiji the Labour M.P.s asked him if he could not help them by providing them with a guide who could go to different parts of the country with them and help them to get out of the rut and meet refreshing people. Gandhiji said he certainly could and handed me over to this group of Englishmen whom I had not met in my life before. But we enjoyed each other's company; and some of

them have been my friends ever since. They were quite an amusing collection of men. Some were very sober men like Reggie Sorensen and Lord Chorley. In earlier life, Reggie was a Minister of the Church, a dedicated and humble social worker in Leyton on the outskirts of London, a constituency which he represented in Parliament for thirty-three years. Lord Chorley, the professor, came from the London School of Economics where all his life he taught company law. There was Woodrow Wyatt, the Puckish member of the team, always out for some mischief or other. Toby Low, the young Tory banker (who later became a big banker and Chairman of Lloyds Bank) formed a team with the other young Tory, Lord Munster. The third Tory of the party, Godfrey Nicholson (of Nicholson's Dry Gin), always carried with him a box of snuff from which he took large pinches of snuff every now and then and pushed it into his nose; he was never happy without his snuff. While flying from Jamshedpur to the Bihar coalfields in a small plane of the Tata Steel Company (which played host to us at the steel city), both Woodrow Wyatt and Godfrey Nicholson insisted that they could take over from the pilot and fly the plane. Neither of them had flown a plane before. But the young Bengali pilot was so impressed with their solemn self-confidence that he seriously believed they were trained men and handed over the plane to Godfrey first and Woodrow next; they sat at the controls; the plane of course flew on its own but at one point we ran into a small air pocket and Woodrow almost killed all of us.

With all their pranks and escapades the Parliamentary delegation did an excellent job of work. Only the Welsh leader, Professor Richards (people in the Labour Party did not seem to know what he was professor of and where and when), got himself into trouble by saying at a Press conference in New Delhi at the end of their trip that they were going to recommend to the Labour Government 'a measure of independence' for India. Newspaper men were alarmed; they thought this delegation was going to recommend 'a measure', i.e. a fraction of what India was impatiently waiting for. What the Welsh professor meant was that they were going to



recommend 'a measure', i.e. a legislative measure to bring about independence for India. I gathered a few months later when Gandhiji sent me to Prime Minister Attlee as his emissary that the delegation, upon its return to Britain, had firmly reported to the Prime Minister that if the Labour Government wanted to salvage any goodwill out of the wreckage of Britain's relations with India it should quit India as early as possible; the British Government could hold India for another ten or fifteen years by force but at the end of it Britain was sure to lose India and with it the last traces of Indian goodwill towards Britain.

It was on the receipt of the report of the Parliamentary delegation that the Labour Cabinet decided to send out to India a Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and Mr. A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty. The announcement about the Mission was made by Lord Pethick-Lawrence on 27th February 1946 in the House of Lords and on 15th March Prime Minister Attlee made a statement in the Commons on India, which had a refreshing tone and content. The Cabinet Mission arrived in Karachi on 23rd March 1946 and reached New Delhi the next day.

I had never met any of the three members of the Mission before. Three or four days after the Mission's arrival I got a message from George Blaker, private secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps, that the Secretary of State and Sir Stafford would like to meet me and could I possibly call at their office in the Viceroy's House. I gathered later that Mr. R. G. Casey (now Lord Casey, Governor-General of Australia), whom I knew well as Governor of Bengal in Calcutta, had written to the Secretary of State and Sir Stafford Cripps to say that he knew a young man, Sudhir Ghosh, who was close to Gandhi and enjoyed Gandhi's confidence in an unusual measure and if the Cabinet Mission got into touch with this young man it would be to their advantage.

Three months earlier Gandhiji had asked me to act as his 'Thomas Cook' for his two-month tour of Bengal and Assam. His first act, upon arrival in Calcutta on 1st December 1945

was to call on Governor Casey and, at my suggestion, Gandhiji met Casey on eight consecutive evenings and they talked for hours in a leisurely manner; this was the breaking of the ice between the British Government and Gandhi since the fateful August of 1942 when the British Government decided to imprison Gandhiji and all the leaders of the Congress Party for the 'Quit India' movement and for refusal to co-operate in the War. After their assumption of power in the summer of 1945 the Labour Government found that they had inherited from Churchill a Viceroy, Lord Wavell, who was a simple soldier with a great sense of honour but not an articulate politician. Casey is warm and articulate and a veteran of Australian and international politics; he was British Cabinet Minister resident in Cairo during the war before he came to Bengal. He had close friends amongst the Labour Party leaders, in particular Sir Stafford Cripps, who had encouraged him to find ways of promoting a dialogue with Gandhi as a preliminary to other actions in India that the new Labour Government contemplated. I was the link between Casey and Gandhiji and created for Casey the opportunity he was looking for. Casey saw the nature of my relationship with Gandhiji; and those eight consecutive evenings of Gandhi-Casey talks have ever since remained a special bond between Casey and me. Casey made me known to Cripps; Cripps at first sight adopted me as someone he had known for ever.

The Cabinet Mission days of March-April-May-June of 1946 were hectic days—first in New Delhi and then in Simla and then back in New Delhi—until the Mission left for London on the 29th June leaving their work in a tangled mess. For the whole of April and half of May the three Englishmen interviewed, day after day, leaders of all political parties, big or small, and leaders of all shades of political opinion apart from Gandhiji, whom they saw very frequently. The heat of Delhi was killing. Like Vallabhbhai Patel, Stafford Cripps had nothing much left inside his body; it was all mental power and a will to live that kept such men going. The mental tension of those weeks, apart from their physical strain, was shattering. For reasons best known to him Gandhiji decided, even before

he reached New Delhi, to use me as his 'errand boy' for his negotiations with the Cabinet Mission. Day after day (and often several times a day and in the night) I ran backwards and forwards between Gandhiji and these three Englishmen and saw them at work. Nerves became frayed and tempers became short. It was a great experience to see the working of Gandhiji's mind and the minds of the two Englishmen, Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence (the third one, Alexander, was for purposes of ballast). It was a great human drama, details of which will have to be narrated separately at a later stage.

After six weeks' gruelling struggle with the politics of India the Cabinet Mission found that the Indian political parties could not put forward a formula for taking over power from Britain which was generally acceptable to all the major parties. The majority party, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji and Mr. Nehru, always took the position that if the British rulers had really made up their mind to part with power then they should hand over power to the Indian majority, represented by the Congress Party, and leave it to the majority to find means of securing the co-operation of the principal minority represented by Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League, and the other Indian minorities. If they wanted the majority and the minority to agree before power could be transferred then such agreement could never be reached. From the very outset the Secretary of State made it clear that whether the Indian leaders believed it or not the British Labour Government had made up its mind to quit India, but they honestly did not believe that they could hand over the whole power to the majority party and leave it to the majority to decide the fate of the minorities, in particular the ninety million Muslims who were not exactly a minority but the second majority in India; they insisted that it was the duty of the British to ensure that the Muslims had got their fair share of power before the British left India.

After the first six weeks of gruelling political negotiation (during which Cripps broke down more than once) the Cabinet Mission came out with a statement on 16th May 1946 in which it declared, in the absence of any agreed basis offered

by the Indian political parties, its own plan for transfer of power from Britain to India. The substance of the 16th May State paper (which is now an important part of Indian history) was that (a) the British Government categorically rejected Mr. Jinnah's demand for division of India into two separate sovereign States and the creation of Pakistan, and that (b) the Muslims must be the *de facto* rulers of two Muslim-majority areas, Bengal-Assam in the east, and Punjab-N.W. Frontier-Baluchistan-Sind in the west; and this arrangement be made within one undivided sovereign State of India with a federal Government in New Delhi controlling (1) Defence, (2) Foreign Affairs, and (3) Communications of the country; this arrangement was to be accepted for a period of ten years; after which sovereign India could change its Constitution in any way it liked.

Curiously enough Mr. Jinnah, the advocate of Pakistan, accepted the British proposal (he called it 'Moth-eaten Pakistan'), which had two parts:

(I) A Constituent Assembly consisting of three sections, Bengal-Assam; Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and Sind; and the rest of India was to meet first in sections and then all together to hammer out a Constitution for free India, and

(II) The formation of an Interim Government as representative as possible of parties who accepted the Constitution-making plan.

While Mr. Jinnah accepted the British plan fairly quickly it took the Congress Party forty days to examine it in detail and to make numerous references back to the Cabinet Mission and then to accept Part (I) of the whole Cabinet Mission proposal without agreeing to form an interim Government; because Mr. Jinnah had demanded that all the Muslim members of the Government must be nominees of the Muslim League; even the President of the Congress Party, Maulana Azad, could not be a member of the Government; and the Cabinet Mission had acquiesced in this demand for the sake of a peaceful settlement.

The Cabinet Mission decided that in these circumstances the latter half of their plan, viz., the formation of an Interim Government, could not be implemented and they decided to leave India for London on 29th June, as they had exhausted their mandate and could not decide the next step without the authority of the British Cabinet. Mr. Jinnah was furious and accused Cripps of trickery and perfidy because Mr. Jinnah had accepted the Mission's plan *in toto* and, according to his understanding of the meaning of the proposal, he was entitled to form a Government even if the majority party had not qualified, under the scheme, to form a Government. It was of course absurd for the minority to form a Government without the agreement of the majority. So when the Mission left for London they were left with acceptance by the majority and the minority of the proposal for forming a Constituent Assembly to frame a Constitution on the basis of the Cabinet Mission's plan for transfer of power, but without a basis for the formation of a Government for the interim period.

The story of how the Congress Party was persuaded to accept half of the Cabinet Mission's proposal (due to Vallabhbhai Patel's practical sense), in spite of doubts and misgivings in the minds of all the Congress leaders, including Gandhiji himself, was another human drama which has to be narrated at a later stage. Mr. Jinnah made a public speech in Bombay after the departure of the Cabinet Mission in which he roundly accused Cripps of dishonesty and suspected a conspiracy between Vallabhbhai Patel and Lord Pethick-Lawrence and did me the honour of referring to me in his speech as the young man who was the villain of the piece.

Before they left New Delhi for London Cripps went to Gandhiji and said: 'Sudhir has been running backwards and forwards between you and us all these months. We did not know him before. He is your young man; but he has been useful not only to you but also to us. Do you think you could send him to London for a couple of months? We are leaving this job in a mess. We have to go back to London and sit with our colleagues in the Cabinet and decide what to do next. During the coming weeks it would be useful to have a man around who knew your

mind and could give us your likely reaction to our thoughts about the next step and could act as an informal line of communication between you and us. As you know we can officially communicate with you only through the Viceroy.' Gandhiji agreed to the proposal before he left Delhi for Poona. Upon arrival at Poona he mentioned to me that one of his principal colleagues had objected to the proposal of sending me as his young emissary to London. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, one of his two principal Secretaries, told me that there was an outburst from Mr. Nehru who had pointed out that it would be a mistake to send a relatively inexperienced young man, however intelligent, to the British Prime Minister with the authority to talk in the name of Gandhiji; he might make an honest mistake, which might cause serious difficulties. After listening patiently to all that Mr. Nehru had to say Gandhiji gently remarked, 'I think he will be all right. I know him well enough.' That was the end of the argument but it became an important landmark in my love-hate relationship with Mr. Nehru.

Gandhiji had his own evaluation of men he knew; it was instinctive, often illogical. He told me that if it became necessary for me to explain whom I represented in London I was to say that I represented Gandhi and not the Congress Party. As I touched his feet to say goodbye the day I left for London he said, 'This is a great mission, God bless you,' and handed me a letter of introduction to Prime Minister Attlee in which he said:

*Poona*

*3rd July, 1946*

Dear Prime Minister,

I wonder if you can remember an Indian being introduced to you by the late Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. That was the present writer. On the strength of that slight acquaintance I make bold to introduce to you my young friend, Shri Sudhir Ghosh. He makes a reliable and steady bridge between Great Britain and India. He loves both passionately. He has made wide British connections. And he made himself a willing instrument in the hands of your Cabinet Mission. At their instance he goes to England. I have wished Godspeed to his mission. He

will interpret India to the best of his ability. He will also have to interpret me. God bless his effort and give his tongue the right word.

I hope the great weight you are carrying sits lightly on you.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*The Right Honourable C. R. Attlee,  
Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
London.*

Attlee was very affable and fatherly when I went to see him at 10 Downing Street and talked at some length in a leisurely manner with a pipe in his mouth. He called in his Parliamentary Private Secretary and asked him to arrange for me to meet some of the younger members of the Labour Party in the House of Commons. Apart from talking Indian politics he inquired where I was staying in London and if I was comfortable there. Was the food reasonably good? In the summer of 1946 London was not a comfortable place to live in; food and fuel were serious problems. I was impressed to see how human this simple and affable man was. He later wrote a letter to Gandhiji and pointed out that he and Gandhiji had met under the auspices of George Lansbury and not Ramsay MacDonald. His private secretary showed me a copy of it and added 'Of course the Prime Minister wrote with his own hand.' The letter said:

*10 Downing Street  
Whitehall  
14 August 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

Thank you for your letter introducing Mr. Ghosh. I much enjoyed a talk with him. I trust that a complete settlement between our two countries may be attained.

I think that the last time we met was in the House of Commons with George Lansbury. I trust that you keep well.

Yours sincerely,

C. R. ATTLEE

During my two and a half months' stay in London I saw Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence very frequently. I watched at close quarters the heart-searching that was going on amongst the British Ministers about India and the sense of special responsibility for the Muslims about which there was continuous struggle between Cripps and Ernest Bevin. In a way the problem of the British was settled for them by Mr. Jinnah. He was so upset by the Cabinet Mission's refusal to let him form a Government in India that he withdrew his acceptance of the Cabinet Mission proposal and decided to launch what he called 'Direct Action' to secure the rights of the Muslims and declared 16th August 1946 as the 'Day of Deliverance'. On that day started a blood bath in the streets of Calcutta. The violence and terror spread into the interior of East Bengal, in particular the district of Noakhali, where the Muslim majority did the Hindu minority unspeakable violence. Later the Hindu community retaliated by doing similar or worse violence to Muslims in Bihar where the Muslims were a minority. This 'Direct Action' movement of Mr. Jinnah and the resulting bloodshed profoundly shocked the British Civil Servants in the India Office who were stubborn supporters of Mr. Jinnah. The result was that the Labour Government came to the firm conclusion that Mr. Jinnah was an unreliable person and accepted the Cripps view that there was no alternative but to hand over *de facto* power immediately to the Indian majority, as always advocated by Gandhiji and Mr. Nehru, and leave it to them to find ways of securing the co-operation of the Muslim minority and the other minorities.

At the height of the 'Direct Action' crisis Gandhiji who was in New Delhi, summoned my wife, Shanti, at the unearthly hour of 4 a.m. on 27th August. He had seen the Viceroy along with Mr. Nehru the previous evening. He could not sleep that night. He wrote on a piece of paper a message for me:

'Gandhi says Viceroy unnerved owing Bengal Tragedy.

'Please tell friends he should be assisted by abler and legal mind. Otherwise repetition of tragedy a certainty.'

Gandhiji handed the piece of paper to my wife and said 'Cable it to him'. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur pointed out that the



message was too cryptic and probably I would not understand what Gandhiji was talking about. 'He knows me well enough', remarked Gandhiji and refused to elaborate the message. As my wife was leaving Gandhiji's room he suddenly said: 'Have you any money?' She smiled and said, 'I have some.' 'Let me know when it is exhausted', said Gandhiji. It was characteristic of the old man to remember such details even in the height of a crisis.

Cripps was unwell and resting in Switzerland under his doctors' orders. All I could do was to write to him and then go and see the Secretary of State and argue the whole thing out with him. I wrote:

*18 Grosvenor Place  
London S.W.1  
28th August, 1946*

My dear Sir Stafford,

I hate to worry you while you are taking much needed rest. But I am writing because I gathered from messages I have received from Gandhiji and Sardar Patel that the situation in India is really serious. I had a telephone message from Sardar Patel on Saturday last the subject of which was the situation created by the gruesome episode of Calcutta. This has been supplemented by a further message from Gandhiji in the form of a cable which I have received today. Although the cable is signed by my wife it is obviously a message worded by Gandhiji himself and handed to her by Gandhiji. It says: \*

'Gandhi says Viceroy unnerved owing Bengal tragedy. Please tell friends he should be assisted by abler and legal mind. Otherwise repetition of tragedy certainty.'

By asking me to tell 'friends' he means I should talk to the Secretary of State and yourself about it. I wish (and I know I should not wish it) you were here and I could come and talk to you about it. The Secretary of State I am hoping to see tomorrow but he is not easy to get at; his officials are naturally careful about letting me see him; but I am worried about the message; Gandhiji evidently sent it after his interview with the Viceroy at Delhi yesterday. And he would not have sent it

unless he was perturbed. I do not quite know what to do about it. Sardar Patel anxiously enquired when you were returning to London from Switzerland. I understand that it will not be possible for you to return on the 3rd September as originally arranged and that you are likely to be back here on the 10th. I know it would be selfish of us to suggest your earlier return. But I thought I should let you know that the Indian situation is steadily leading to a crisis.

As you well know, neither Gandhiji nor Panditji nor Sardar Patel has any confidence in the Viceroy's ability to deal with the present delicate situation. The situation is not only delicate, it is now dangerous. We cannot afford a repetition of the Calcutta holocaust. Sardar Patel told me on the telephone that the number of the dead was not 3,000; it was more like 10,000. Many thousands more were injured and maimed. We have never in our history seen such butchery of women and children.

Sardar Patel tells me that Mr. Suhrawardy, the Bengal Chief Minister, is even now openly inciting violence. I know this man and I know what stuff he is made of. He is a person who does not hesitate to do anything however wicked, so long as it suits his end. I remember Mr. Casey telling me one day 'I know this man is a rogue. But I have no means of catching him; he is too clever.'

It may be that the Congress people exaggerate, as they may be prejudiced against Suhrawardy. But the Calcutta *Statesman* which is the only British newspaper in India (no friend of the Congress people) which has been blaming the British Government for not allowing Mr. Jinnah to form a Government has publicly accused Suhrawardy of a double crime. He has not only fallen down on his job of maintaining order but was also implicated in the crime of breaking the peace. When the keeper of the law becomes the breaker of the law the situation becomes intolerable. Sardar Patel naturally says that you cannot have it both ways; you either run the Government and keep the law or go out of it and face the consequences. If you have no desire to keep the law (and you do not hesitate to say so) and yet would not go out of office the only way to treat you is to push you out of office. But the Viceroy in Delhi and the people here seem to be

much confused about the Indian situation. They seem to imagine that there is some sanctity attached to murder when it is committed by people who have a political grievance and that you must not do anything to annoy the murderer for he is an aggrieved party in a political dispute. As Pandit Nehru has said, what is happening in India is no longer a communal riot; it goes against all decent human feeling.

Gandhiji, as you know, is very careful about the use of words. When he says that the Viceroy is confused and the situation is such that the Viceroy needs the help of a mind abler than his own Gandhiji's words must be taken seriously.

I do hope these few weeks in Switzerland have given you the rest you needed and you are yourself again.

My love and best regards to Lady Cripps and yourself.

Yours

SUDHIR

*The Right Hon'ble Sir Stafford Cripps,  
48, Kelten Strasse,  
Zurich,  
Switzerland.*

In spite of his indifferent health Cripps wrote to me from his Nursing Home in Zurich to say:

*48 Kelten Strasse  
Zurich  
7-9-46*

My dear Sudhir,

It was nice to hear from you though I was sorry to read the contents of your letter. I will not discuss it now, but I shall be back in London on the 10th and you should ring up my office and arrange to come and see me as soon as I can be free. I hope you have been able to see the Secretary of State and that there is some improvement in the Indian situation.

All our best wishes,

STAFFORD CRIPPS

After the shock administered to the British Government by Mr. Jinnah's 'Direct Action', the great British decision was

made that without waiting for any constitutional changes the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, should invite Mr. Nehru as the leader of the majority party immediately to form an Interim Government. Despite the letter of the law the Viceroy was instructed to assume the same position in India as the King in England; Mr. Nehru who was to be called Vice-President of the Viceroy's Executive Council was to be the *de facto* Prime Minister. On this understanding Mr. Nehru formed his Government on 3rd September 1946 with representatives of the Congress Party and two Christians, Dr. John Mathai and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and two non-League Muslims, Sir Shafat Ahmed Khan and Mr. Ali Zaheer. The Muslim League representing the principal minority remained outside the Government.

The Government at once became a coherent cabinet and after months of uncertainty and confusion the country heaved a deep sigh of relief. I remember I spoke to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on the telephone from London the day they assumed office. He was bursting with optimism and was confident that the Muslim League would come in after some negotiation and bargaining and that once there was an effective Government in the country and peace was restored there would be no difficulty in hammering out a constitution acceptable to all sections of Indian opinion.

There was one group of powerful men in Delhi who were deeply upset by these developments. They were a coterie of top British civil servants who were the 'steel frame' of the British Government in India. They saw that real power had been handed over to the Congress Party and they resented the action of the Labour Government. These powerful men who were in actual control of the Government machine started working on Lord Wavell and convinced him that it was dangerous to leave the Muslims out of the Government. Lord Wavell started putting almost daily pressure on Mr. Nehru to bring in the Muslims to complete the incomplete Government and there was much tension between him and his *de facto* Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru. I was still in London anxiously watching these developments from that end. On the morning of 23rd September I was surprised to read in *The Times* a report

prominently published that the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had started negotiations with Mr. Jinnah with a view to bringing the representatives of the Muslim League into the Government. I ran down to the Board of Trade in Millbank (former I.C.I. building) and demanded an interview with Sir Stafford. I told him quite excitedly that the Viceroy's action would ruin his entire effort; didn't he see that it was one thing for the Muslim League to come into the Government as a result of persuasion by Mr. Nehru to work with him; it was quite another thing for the Muslim League to come in as a result of the Viceroy's negotiation; it would then be a Government of two lots of people at loggerheads with each other, presided over by a third party. Sir Stafford said, 'Listen, dear boy, I have seen this news in the newspapers as you have seen it this morning. We have heard nothing officially from the Viceroy. As soon as I saw the news I rang up the Secretary of State; he had heard nothing either. But you can be sure of one thing. Wavell is a very honourable man. He may be a simple-minded soldier but he is a very honest man. He has clear instructions from the Government that Nehru must be treated as a real Prime Minister and the responsibility of bringing the Muslim League into the Government was his. If Wavell has started this negotiation with the League you may be quite sure that he must have done so with the approval and sanction of Nehru.'

I immediately decided to return to India and went over to the India Office to say goodbye to the Secretary of State. The kindly old man talked with much warmth; he said I had done more or less all I wanted to do and he agreed that I should return to Gandhiji. He wrote out this letter and handed it to me with the words, 'Give him my love'.

*India Office  
Whitehall*

*25th September 1946*

*Personal & Private*

My dear Gandhiji,

I have already sent you a line of good wishes for your birthday but as Sudhir Ghosh tells me he is shortly returning to

India, I am sending you this further word of good wishes through him.

It has been a pleasure to see him from time to time and it recalls our talks, when he used to come with you to see us in Willingdon Crescent. He has found many opportunities of service over here and I am sure he has discharged them with his usual fidelity and judgment.

Sincerely yours,

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

On the 2nd October I reached Delhi and went direct from the airport to Gandhiji in the Bhangi Colony and found him busy with Mr. Shoaib Qureshi, an associate of the Nawab of Bhopal who was acting as a link between the Congress Camp and the Muslim League Camp in the hectic negotiations that were going on for the coming in of the Muslim League into the Government. As soon as the visitors left Gandhiji I walked in and told him what Cripps had told me in London, that if Lord Wavell had started negotiations with the Muslim League he must have done so with the approval and sanction of Nehru and that the Viceroy had strict instructions not to interfere with Mr. Nehru's responsibility in this matter. Gandhiji said, 'I am surprised to hear this. Jawaharlal is very angry with the Viceroy for starting this negotiation with the Muslim League. You go straight to Jawaharlal's house and tell him word for word what you have told me.' I took myself promptly to 17 York Road where Mr. Nehru used to live in those days in a modest house. After a few preliminary words of greetings I got off my chest what was bothering me ever since I saw Cripps in his office in London a few days earlier. Mr. Nehru burst out in his characteristic manner and said, 'Well, this man [meaning the Viceroy] has been pestering me day after day—about bringing the Muslim League into the incomplete Government and he has been pressing me to start talks with Jinnah. A few days ago in the course of a conversation I told him in sheer exasperation that I was not going to talk to Jinnah; if he was so keen to talk to Jinnah he could go and talk to Jinnah. Next morning he started negotiations with Jinnah.'

I quietly explained to Mr. Nehru that Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Pethick-Lawrence had told me that the Viceroy had clear instructions from the Labour Government that the responsibility of securing the co-operation of the Muslim League belonged entirely to Mr. Nehru and the Viceroy was not to interfere with it in any way. 'Don't you see', I said, 'that the Muslim League will now come into the Government, not as a result of an understanding with you and to work with you, but as a result of an understanding with the third party and to work against you. Why did you not tell the Viceroy that if he was going to interfere with your responsibility he could have your resignation. The Government in London would have given you their fullest support.' He said: 'Well, I have told you all I know about it.' He looked tired and worried and unhappy. Since that day I lost my faith in Toynbee's 'wave theory' of history. At a crucial moment of history the mere loss of temper by a man of destiny can change the course of history.

The British bureaucrats in New Delhi won the battle of wits against Nehru by misleading the simple-minded Viceroy who believed in all good faith that he had made quite an achievement by bringing the Muslims, headed by Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, into the Cabinet. There was a reshuffle and the Muslim League members were given some of the important portfolios like Finance and Commerce. But after having got into the Government they declared that the Congress Party leaders had usurped the whole power and were doing grievous damage to the interests of the Muslims and in order to prevent this misuse of power and to safeguard the interests of the Muslims of India they had joined the Government. The Government immediately became divided into two parts; even the Civil Servants took sides according to their loyalties, the Muslim officials taking the side of the Muslim Ministers and the Hindus and others supporting the Congress Party Ministers. Even the armed forces were under the strain of divided loyalties. Violence and lawlessness were rampant in different parts of the country. Bengal and Bihar were in turmoil but there was no effective Government in New Delhi. Gandhiji

was away from Delhi in East Bengal first and then in Bihar where brother had taken brother's blood; in spite of the entreaties of Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel he refused to visit Delhi where his colleagues were being called upon to take grave decisions about the future of the country. The months of October, November and December of 1946 were months of frustration and bitterness for Nehru and his colleagues in the Government. It was the frustration and bitterness of those unhappy months that led the Congress Party leaders to the conclusion that it was better to divide the country and to be left in peace at least in a part of it, so that they could go ahead with their task of building up Parliamentary Democracy and the eradication of poverty, than to remain together in one sovereign State in perpetual hatred and distrust. That was how India was divided.

Since my return from London on the 2nd October I had functioned as a letter writer whose unofficial job was to interpret the Congress leaders to Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Pethick-Lawrence and to keep them informed about what was happening in India. The day I left London Sir Stafford Cripps said, 'Do write very fully so that we can sense what is happening.' I wrote a long series of letters and give below a sample of these and the reaction of the two British statesmen.

*24 Barakhambha Road, New Delhi  
10th November 1946*

My dear Lord Pethick-Lawrence,

I send you with this letter a note\* on recent happenings in Bihar which is prepared, as you will see, by someone who has a passion for accuracy and fairness. This will give you a better insight into what happened in that Province than the lengthy reports you must be getting from other quarters.

I also enclose a newspaper clipping which gives Muriel Lester's account of the state of things in the East Bengal villages where the reign of terror has not yet ended. This is a dispassionate account. You know Muriel Lester. It is however not a detailed report; but it gives you an idea of the kind of life

\* Written by Mr. Nehru.



the terror-stricken people are living today in that part of the country.

I enclose another clipping of the *Statesman* newspaper of today's date. You will see that Mr. Jinnah has made a declaration that although he allowed his five men to join the Government the Muslim League never agreed to the basis of the Cabinet Mission's scheme for an Interim Government in India. You will, I am sure, agree that this is a disturbing declaration. Evidently the Viceroy did not consider it necessary for the Muslim League to accept the Cabinet Mission's plan before they could get into the Government.

This extraordinary haste to placate the Muslim League somehow or other is really the curse of the Indian situation. Bringing the Muslim League into the Government in this manner is no achievement and it does not get us anywhere. It only makes an already complicated situation much more complicated.

I know that after having made the logical and courageous decision to hand over the Government to the majority party (and such other people as were prepared to work with them) without waiting for a settlement between the Congress and the League, the British Cabinet was naturally anxious that the Muslims should be brought into the Government at the earliest possible moment. This anxiety is understandable and it was appreciated by every honest and right-thinking Indian. But merely getting together two lots of people into a Government without any kind of understanding between them does not make the Government a coalition. Gandhiji has said this again and again to you. But I suppose your people think they know better.

You had a Coalition Government in your country during the war emergency. The basis of that Government was the majority party, the leadership of the Government belonged to the majority party and the leader of the majority party persuaded the minority parties to join his Government; to achieve this he, of course, had to make certain concessions. This is the only way to get together a Coalition Government. Surely this is what you intended to do in India, too, when you

decided to invite the Congress to take over the Government and to find means of persuading the Muslim League to come into it? But our people here were, of course, supposed to do this job under the supervision of the British Viceroy. In spite of this limitation it would have been possible for them to do it if the British Viceroy was so big a man that he would willingly and cheerfully make himself unnecessary.

I know that many of my English friends will tell me that the Viceroy had to make himself necessary because the Congress people were not particularly anxious to get the Muslims into the Government. I do admit that there are people in the Congress who were not frightfully keen to have the Leaguers in the Government and would not mind going ahead without them. But surely you know Pandit Nehru well enough. How could the Viceroy be more anxious than Pandit Nehru to persuade the Muslims to come in? Surely he knew better than the Viceroy that the only way to keep the country in order during the dangerous period of transition and to create an atmosphere in which it would be possible to hammer out an acceptable constitution for 400 million people was to persuade the Muslims to work with him in the Government? If your people showed wisdom and left it to Pandit Nehru's judgment I have no doubt that he would have got the Muslims in without destroying the character of the Government

What has been achieved in haste is clearly not going to endure. Things are going to come to a head very soon and in the end you will have to be more unpleasant to the Muslims than was really necessary. For, what other course is open but to dismiss the League Members of the Cabinet if they have not accepted the basis of the Cabinet Mission's Plan for an Interim Government?

I see in the newspapers that Mr. Churchill is going to demand a debate on India and he has made a lengthy statement on lawlessness and bloodshed in large areas of this country. People in England seem to imagine that the British Government handed over India to the Interim Government here and this outbreak of lawlessness is going to test the Interim Government's ability to shoulder the responsibility. Pandit Nehru is much

more concerned about this bloodshed than Mr. Churchill or the British people. But where is the remedy for it? You know how this lawlessness started. It started in Calcutta as a political game on the 16th of August the day of the Muslim League 'Direct Action'. Killing and arson and loot by the Muslims went on in broad daylight in the streets of Calcutta. The organized Government of the Province was either uninterested or incompetent to stop this lawlessness. The people found that it was no use appealing to any authority for protection and then they took the law into their own hands. For every Hindu killed by the Muslims the Hindus took at least two Muslim lives; they were just as savage as the Muslims. Then it stopped for a while. Gandhiji warned you at that time that this tragedy was sure to be repeated if the Viceroy did not show firmness in his treatment of the Muslim League. As far as I could understand the mind of your colleagues at that time you felt that all this lawlessness was due to the dissatisfaction in the Muslim mind and the right way to deal with the situation was to try and get the Muslims into the Interim Government and if that happened there would be no further lawlessness and killing. I suppose that was the explanation of the frantic effort to get the Muslims into the Government. The Muslims were brought into the Government, but the riots did not stop. This time it was organized in a part of Bengal where there is a small Hindu minority. It was an organized affair. You will see Muriel Lester has mentioned how stirrup pumps and rationed petrol were brought into these remote villages by the breakers of the law. The small Hindu minority was brutally persecuted; murder and arson and loot and abduction and rape of women went on unchecked. The Governor's report which was read out by Mr. Henderson in the House of Commons was a misleading understatement. He did not do it deliberately; that was all that he was allowed to know. All this persecution by the Muslims—particularly the dishonour of Hindu women—inflamed Hindu feeling all over the country and in the neighbouring Province of Bihar where there is a small Muslim minority the Hindus in a most cowardly manner killed a very large number of Muslim men, women, and

children. The number of Muslims killed in Bihar is probably four times the number of Hindus killed in East Bengal. The Hindus of this country have now learnt that if the Muslims take one Hindu life the Hindus must take four Muslim lives and then it stops. This mutual killing will go on until the Muslims realize that 'Direct Action' does not pay.

The Interim Government is in an absurd position. The common man in India thinks that this much-talked-of interim Government is no good at all. For they cannot give him the protection he needs. Then there are people abroad like General Smuts who are taking full advantage of our unfortunate situation in India. General Smuts makes a speech at the U.N. and says that the Indians in their own home are killing each other by the thousand because of their racial hatred and then they complain to the world about racial discrimination in South Africa. This is obviously a fling at Nehru and his colleagues. *The Times* newspaper writes that what is needed in India is a Government not afraid to govern. Every Indian wants in this country a Government not afraid to govern. But it is the British Viceroy who is afraid to govern and the responsibility of governing is in his hands. This fear is explained by the present policy pursued by him (presumably with your approval) towards the Muslim League. A stage has now been reached when you have to make up your mind either to tell the Viceroy to govern or to hand over the responsibility of governing to Nehru. You cannot have it both ways. Either course will necessitate a radical change in the present policy of appeasing the Muslim League.

The killing of the Muslims in Bihar by the Hindus has been so ruthless that there will be a lull in India for a little time. This is the time for stock-taking. Is it not possible to ask Mr. Jinnah in plain language if he is prepared to play the game or not? If he is not prepared to say that he accepts the Cabinet Mission's declaration of 16 May in its entirety is it not possible to tell him that the Government must be left in the hands of those who accepted the basis of the Interim Government, viz., the Congress and the smaller minorities? But Mr. Jinnah is a clever man and he will tell you that he does not accept the

May 16 offer but he is coming into the Constituent Assembly. Mr. Jinnah knows the weakness of the British Government. He knows that the weakness on your side is that the British Government is much too anxious to tell the world about their achievement in India (which is about the only thing on their credit side in the whole sphere of foreign affairs). For this it is necessary somehow or other to keep the Muslims in the Government. Mr. Jinnah will take the fullest advantage of that anxiety on the part of the British. But if it is possible to show firmness and tell Mr. Jinnah that he must either play the game or the Government is going to be left in the hands of the majority and the responsibility of keeping the country in order in the transition period and of finding means of hammering out an acceptable constitution for the country would be left to the resources of the majority, then you will find that your achievement in India will be genuine and not the unreal thing which is being shown off to the world today.

I am sorry if this letter sounds harsh. The situation here is so serious that one must take the risk of being harsh if one claims to be a genuine friend of the British. For the whole future relationship between the British and the Indian peoples will be determined by what sort of a job the British Government make of all this during this critical time. If things steadily deteriorate as they are deteriorating, then my fear is that this country will turn its back on England for ever.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

SUDHIR GHOSH

*The Right Honourable  
Lord Pethick-Lawrence,  
Secretary of State,  
India Office  
Whitehall,  
London, S.W.1*

**CONFIDENTIAL**

*November 6, 1946*

\*Note on recent events and disturbances in Bihar

\* Written at the Circuit House, Patna, by Mr. Nehru on 6th November 1946.

Bihar is a province with a sturdy and yet a very poor peasantry. They are a likeable people, easily led and sometimes easily misled. Perhaps more than any one in India, they have a capacity for mass functioning. Mass psychology pervades them and, if an idea gets hold of the people, they are prepared to act *en masse* in furtherance of that idea. Hence there have been strong agrarian movements in Bihar and occasionally upheavals, communal or otherwise.

2. Ever since 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi successfully led the movement against plantations (chiefly European) in Champaran district, he has been tremendously popular with the people of this Province. From that time onward also the Bihar peasantry took to the Congress, and the Congress in Bihar progressively reflected the agrarian demands of the peasantry. In the Congress itself in the Province a strong left wing group grew up which went even further in regard to the agrarian demands. Lately the Congress, all over India, adopted as its programme the ending of the Zamindari system. Thus this left wing programme became the official programme of the Congress in this matter. There has, however, been considerable delay in giving effect to it and some dissatisfaction results as a consequence. Lately there has been a special agitation among the peasants over what is known as the Batai system under which the produce is shared. Some have urged the tenants to cut their crops even when they are not entitled to do so under law. On the other hand the Zamindars have shown great resentment at the proposal of the Bihar Government to abolish the Zamindari system.

3. There have been in the past some major communal riots in Bihar, notably at Shahabad about 1917, when the Hindu peasantry rose and killed a large number of Muslims. Normally the Hindus and Muslims in Bihar have lived very peacefully together and no communal question arises. The usual conflict is between the tenant and the landlord. But over a religious issue, like cow-killing, passionate feelings have been aroused in the past among the Hindus. The effect of the Congress movement from 1919 onwards was to improve communal relations

greatly. Some of the prominent leaders of the Congress in Bihar, notably Dr. Rajendra Prasad, were respected and liked by Muslims and Hindus alike. A change has gradually come over the scene since the new policy of the Muslim League during the last few years. Even in the general elections of 1937 the Muslim League failed badly. A large independent group of Muslims was elected and this kept apart from the League and was on the whole friendly to the Congress, which included in its ranks a number of Muslim members in the Legislatures.

4. Since the Muslim League adopted Pakistan as its objective and started even before that an agitation based on hatred and bitter denunciation of the Congress as well as of the Hindus generally, reactions gradually began to set in which were taken advantage of by the Hindu Mahasabha and like organizations. This did not affect the widespread popularity of the Congress among the Hindu masses so far as the political issues were concerned. But it did produce communal feeling and a tendency among the middle class to criticize the Congress for not supporting the Hindu cause as against the Muslim League.

5. As the communal and political situation developed during the last seven years, a feeling of exasperation took hold of the Hindus at what they considered the unpatriotic and highly objectionable attitude of the Muslim League. They read from day to day violent attacks in the press made by leaders of the League on Hindus as well as the Congress and all manner of threats to achieve Pakistan by force. One of the Muslim slogans was and is *Pakistan Khun se Lenge* (We shall take Pakistan through blood). There were also attacks and denunciations of the Hindu religion and practices. This feeling percolated, to some extent, even to the Hindu masses in Bihar. Never too docile, the peasantry reacted rather aggressively to it but was kept in check by Congress leaders. Among the Muslims also a fairly considerable movement arose among the Momins, or the weaver class, which refused to associate itself with the League and was on the whole friendly to the Congress and co-operated with it. They rejected the idea of Pakistan.

6. Events from 1942 onwards convinced the Hindu masses in Bihar, as elsewhere, that the Muslim League was a barrier not only to the freedom of their country but to the achievement of their own social demands. The Muslim League leadership was very largely socially reactionary and consisting of the landlord class. The appeals to hatred on behalf of the Muslim League brought about a like reaction among the Hindus.

7. This has been the background of recent events. The events in Calcutta from the 16th August onwards resulted in the killing of a large number of Biharis in Calcutta. Many of their shops were also looted in Calcutta. Many of the Gwalas (milkmen), the cartmen, the rikshaw-wallas and the Darwans or doorkeepers in Calcutta were Biharis. There is also in Bihar a large Bengali Hindu population. The news of this killing in Calcutta affected Biharis profoundly. The relatives of those killed returned to Bihar as well as other refugees. They spread out in the rural areas carrying stories with them of what had happened in Calcutta. This created a feeling of great resentment through the Province.

8. On top of this came news of Noakhali and East Bengal, more especially the accounts of forcible conversion of large numbers of people and abduction and rape of Hindu women. This kind of thing is likely to inflame any people anywhere. Hindus especially are more affected by anything involving abduction and rape of women and forcible conversion. The Biharis became terribly excited and the Bengali element in Bihar was even more excited.

9. There was some propaganda on behalf of Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu organizations after Noakhali. Many anonymous leaflets were issued asking for revenge for what happened in East Bengal and public criticism was directed to the passivity of the Central Government in allowing matters to proceed in East Bengal without intervention. The Interim Government was especially attacked for its seeming inactivity when horrible things were happening in Noakhali. A feeling grew that nobody was helping the helpless Hindus of East Bengal while the Provincial Government of Bengal was



deliberately pursuing a policy of exterminating Hinduism from East Bengal either by killing or by forcible conversion. It is immaterial how far these facts were true. The point is that there was the strong feeling and the stock of the Interim Government fell very greatly.

One notice, purporting to be issued on behalf of the Muslim League, was widely circulated in many parts of India and especially in Bihar. This gave instructions to kill Hindus, loot their property and do various other highly objectionable things in order to establish Pakistan. Who issued this notice, nobody seems to know. But apparently it came from Bengal. It is unlikely that anyone on behalf of the Muslim League could issue such a notice. However this may be, many of the Hindus who read it did not doubt that it did come from the Muslim League because they could believe anything about the Muslim League. They became utterly convinced that the Muslim League was bent on indulging in the most heinous crime in pursuance of its policy of direct action. This, they thought, had to be resisted at every cost and, if the other party was going to be so thoroughly unscrupulous, the Hindus should not stick to scruple either.

10. Towards the end of September there was an incident at Benibad in Patna district. The Hindus suspected a Muslim Zamindar of having abducted a Hindu girl from Calcutta. Demands were made for the girl to be produced. Ultimately he promised to do so after two or three days. On the appointed day a crowd went to his place. They found, however, that the girl had been removed and the Zamindar also had gone. Thereupon the crowd got completely out of hand and attacked the house and destroyed it and a number of Muslims were killed. A large number of persons were arrested for this and are under trial. Compensation was given by the local Government to the family of the Zamindar and others concerned. In all Rs. 40,000/- were given—Rs. 20,000/- as a gift and Rs. 20,000/- as loan without interest.

11. On or about the 25th October a Noakhali Day was observed in various parts of Bihar. A huge procession was taken out in

Patna and a very big meeting was held. Though the official slogans and speeches were more or less restrained, many other slogans were heard asking for revenge for Noakhali. Some of the speeches were not restrained.

12. On or about 26th of October trouble broke out in Chapra, both in the town and surrounding district. This was controlled within a day or two and nothing much has happened since then. In Bhagalpur city there was also a communal riot soon after Chapra. This was soon suppressed.

13. Real trouble started in the Patna district on the 31st October. This came rather suddenly and was on a big scale. It spread from day to day, covering a large part of the district, overflowing into Gaya and Monghyr districts. It was in a sense a mass uprising, in certain affected areas large numbers of peasants taking part. They attacked Muslim houses and burnt them down, killed Muslims and looted their property.

14. While it is clear that the basic cause of all this trouble which affected a large number of people, was the intense feeling roused by stories about Noakhali and the resentment against the Muslim League policy and threats, there were probably a number of minor causes also which led to the rapid growth of this lawlessness. The agitation among the peasantry which had been going on for some time fed the larger movement. The Hindu tenants of Muslim Zamindars found excuse for attacking their Zamindars. Curiously enough it would appear that certain Hindu Zamindars and maybe some Muslim Zamindars also, not realizing the consequences of what they were doing, wanted to take advantage of this movement to divert the attention of the peasantry from the agrarian demands. There was also a general resentment among the landlord class against the Provincial Government because of its policy in favour of abolition of the Zamindari system. Black-marketeers were also generally ill-disposed towards the Government, more especially in Chapra. There were a number of local and petty grievances also. All this went to feed the major grievance which was not against the Local Government at all.

15. It is not clear yet whether there were any leaders of this widespread movement, apart from local leaders. There is some evidence, however, of people going about on bicycles and otherwise distributing leaflets which contained incitement to the people. The movement had an appearance of a spontaneous uprising in various parts chiefly involving the peasantry. No well-known persons so far appear to be directly involved. At an early stage, however, certain known anti-social elements took the lead in certain areas. It is known that some notorious dacoits are participating and warrants are out for their arrest. These dacoits apparently possess some fire-arms which they have been using. The peasantry of course functioned chiefly with their *lathis*\* and sometimes with spears or other odd weapons.

16. When the main trouble started the Government was functioning in Ranchi, away from the seat of trouble. The Governor about that time went to Bombay. For this and various other reasons, there was a slight delay in dealing with it. Probably there was no immediate realization of what was going to happen. The Prime Minister of Bihar went to Chapra very soon after the occurrence there. On the 31st October he made a request to the Military Officer in command for troops. The Brigadier, however, did not think that any necessity had so far arisen. He said that the situation was not nearly so bad as yet as in 1942. However some patrolling was done by the troops. This was not very effective as the troops did not go beyond the main roads and trouble was in the interior.

17. During the first two or three days one had a sensation that governmental action was not as swift and effective as it might have been. Partly this was due to the absence of many of the Ministers as well as the Governor, partly to the suddenness of the outbreak, but partly, it appears, to the complacency of the permanent officers. Probably the criticism is not justified but it is asserted by a variety of people that some of these permanent officers were not too greatly displeased at this new embarrassment of the Provincial Government. Many odd people indeed

\* Wooden staves.

liked to see anything happen which might bring some discredit on the Ministry. An instance which brings out the slowness of the governmental apparatus during these first two days is that at a place where a Hindu mob killed about 25 to 30 Muslims on a railway platform, for over two days after this murder the bodies lay on the platform and nobody took the trouble to remove them. It was only after a Minister went there and saw these bodies for himself that they were removed under his express orders.

18. From the 31st October onwards trouble rapidly spread in Patna district and in part of Monghyr district. Muslim *basties* were burnt and looted and many Muslims were killed. This was a ruthless and inhuman affair and women and children even were not spared. People seemed to have gone mad. Large numbers of refugees poured into Patna and other relief camps opened by Government or by private organizations. These refugees were often in a pitiable state and naturally terribly panic-stricken and excited. They brought stories of horrible conditions prevailing in their areas. These stories were inevitably greatly exaggerated. Any person whom they knew and whom they did not see with them was presumed to be dead. Nevertheless allowing for all exaggeration what had happened was terrible enough. There were gross cases of cruelty and insensate behaviour.

19. On the other hand there were many cases also of Hindu villagers affording protection to Muslims. In one case the Hindus of a village collected their Muslim neighbours for protection and violently resisted an attacking Hindu mob which wanted to get at those Muslims. They succeeded in protecting them. Many Hindus also helped in evacuating Muslims by carrying their baggage and otherwise assisting them in every way. Many Muslims testify to the help they received from the Hindus of their village.

20. In some instances the Muslims resisted with firearms or other means the Hindu mob attacking them. But generally speaking it can be said that there was very little Muslim resistance in the face of overwhelming numbers.

21. The situation was a very difficult one as the areas involved could not be easily reached, although they were not very far as distance goes. They were in the interior with no proper roads, and flooded areas surrounded them. Usually when armed police or a troop patrol approached a crowd this crowd rapidly dispersed and vanished into the fields. They did not offer any resistance except occasionally when there was that hard core of professional dacoits with firearms.

22. Large refugee camps for Muslim refugees have grown up in Patna and in various other areas. The problem of feeding and clothing them as well as of protecting them from any further raids became an important one. On the whole it has been tackled successfully. In one case, however, a group of refugees being transported under some police protection was attacked by a mob and most of them were killed including some policemen.

23. On the 3rd November afternoon Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Mr. Liaquat Ali and Mr. Abdur Rab Nishtar arrived in Patna. The news they received was so grave that it was decided that two of them, namely Nehru and Nishtar, should stay in Patna. On the 4th November these two accompanied by a Bihar Minister and other prominent local leaders visited some of the affected areas. They went to Biharsharif in the Patna district, stopping at many places and addressing public gatherings on the way. They also went to Jahanabad in Monghyr district addressing large meetings en route. The next day, 5th November, they visited the badly affected areas in Monghyr district and also went to Bhagalpur. A meeting in Patna city was also addressed by them on November 4th.

24. These meetings held in the affected areas were very largely attended by the peasantry and they obviously produced effect. Nehru spoke strongly and at the end of every meeting induced the audience present to take a pledge, with arms upraised, not to indulge in any misbehaviour. Subsequent reports stated that these peasants who had so pledged themselves felt the weight of their promise and in fact told others that

now that they had given their word they must act up to it. A certain improvement was thus noticeable, but large areas, especially in the interior, were not touched by these meetings, and a hard core of the lawless element would probably, in any event, not have been touched. So while there was a certain toning down in some areas, the trouble spread in other places adjoining them.

25. On the evening of the 5th November a conference was held at which General Bucher, the G.O.C. Eastern Command and General Ekin were present. Among others present were the Prime Minister of Bihar, Anugrah Narain Sinha, Minister Bihar, Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Abdur Rab Nishtar. Also the Chief Secretary and the I.G. of Police of the Government of Bihar. At this conference various measures were discussed and General Bucher explained how he proposed to use the troops at his disposal. He informed the conference that additional troops were coming and he intended visiting the affected areas and at the same time patrolling every place in those areas. Thus far the Provincial Government had found it very difficult to control the situation because of the insufficient forces at its disposal. There was no conflict between their forces and the mobs. In fact they could not even develop contact. The mob disappeared and functioned elsewhere. Now for the first time effective arrangements could be made to reach all the affected parts both to give protection to those who needed it and to control and suppress the elements giving trouble. Various other proposals were made at the conference and accepted. These included the application of Sec. 144 and curfew in certain rural areas. Also the requisitioning of private cars for patrol purposes.

26. Owing to the very large influx of Muslim refugees into Patna, the Hindus in Patna became rather frightened and expected some kind of an attack. Excitement and fear on both sides were heightened by the shouting of slogans throughout the night. But nothing has happened in Patna and nothing is likely to happen now, although tension continues. This kind of mutual fear exists in several towns.

27. On the 6th morning Nehru and Rajendra Prasad addressed two very largely attended meetings at Dinapore and Patna. Kripalani also addressed the latter meeting. These meetings produced a very good effect and, to some extent allayed the tension. In the afternoon Nehru flew with Bucher to Gaya where there was a large meeting and a subsequent conference with local officers at which Anugrah Narain Sinha was also present. Effective measures were decided upon for the affected areas of the Gaya district.

28. Rajendra Prasad and Kripalani went to Biharsharif on the 6th afternoon and proposed to return on the 7th. On the 7th morning Nehru, Bucher and Anugrah Narain Sinha intend flying low over all the affected areas.

29. During the last two or three days there has been repeated firing by the Military and the Police on hostile Hindu mobs. Casualties are not yet known. Generally they have been low except on one occasion when they are said to approach 100.

30. The position on the 6th night is that on the whole the situation is quietening down, though there are pockets of trouble still. With the help of Government large numbers of Muslims are being brought from the outlying villages to Patna or to such other relief camps. Food and blankets are being given to them as well as medical attention. General Bucher has promised to help with medical supplies as well as doctors.

31. The troops stationed in various places are chiefly Indian troops, though there is a regiment of British troops also. General Bucher is co-operating in every way with the civil authorities and has impressed upon his troops the necessity for friendly relations with the people. The people have also been asked to co-operate with the troops who have come to help them. On the whole all steps being taken are co-operative and there is every hope that within a day or two the situation will be completely controlled.

32. There has been a danger of trouble spreading to other areas. Arrah is a particularly difficult district if any trouble takes

place there. Fortunately nothing has happened there so far, except of course the usual tension. It is important to end the present trouble in the affected areas with extreme rapidity so as to avoid its spreading to Arrah or other places.

33. For the present our efforts are being concentrated on putting an end to trouble and lawlessness and to protecting the refugees and evacuees. Very soon, the problem of rehabilitating them will arise. It will be a difficult problem but the Provincial Government has every intention of dealing with it thoroughly.

34. In the course of various operations aeroplanes have been fully used for reconnoitring work. On one or two occasions tear gas bombs were thrown from the aeroplanes over hostile mobs. They did not seem to frighten the crowd much.

35. Nehru is staying on in Patna for the present and so long as he feels that his presence might be of some help.

The Secretary of State replied to say:

*India Office  
Whitehall*

*21st November, 1946*

My dear Sudhir,

I have to acknowledge your letter of 10th November and enclosures. You will not, I am sure, expect from me any comment except to say how deeply I am distressed by the events in Bengal and Bihar.

With all personal greetings,

Yours sincerely,

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

*Sudhir Ghosh, Esq.*

I naturally could not expect the Secretary of State to write in detail to tell me what the British Government were going to do. By December, however, it became clear to the Labour Government in London that the Government in New Delhi had come to a grinding halt. Early in December the British



Government invited the Viceroy Lord Wavell together with Mr. Nehru and Mr. Jinnah and a representative of the Sikh community, Sardar Baldev Singh, who was Defence Member in the Government, to come to London to review the whole situation with Prime Minister Attlee and his colleagues. Cripps, the brain behind all that the Labour Government was doing regarding India, realized that it was no longer possible for Nehru to work with Wavell; they had become completely incompatible with each other. It was during this visit to London that Cripps brought together Mr. Nehru and Viscount Mountbatten, a relation of the royal family, who had a distinguished career as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces of the South-East Asia Command; and Cripps told Nehru that if he felt that he and Mountbatten could work together then he would do his best to get Mountbatten appointed as Viceroy in Wavell's place.

Indeed Cripps had at one stage thought of getting himself appointed as Viceroy and of coming out to India personally to supervise the transfer of power of which he was the real architect. He conveyed his thoughts to me through Lady Cripps who passed through New Delhi in December 1946 on her way back from China where she had been invited by both the Chiang Kai Shek Government and the Communist leaders (who were in occupation of a part of China) to receive their thanks for the magnificent work she had done by raising the 'Save the Children Fund' amounting to several million pounds sterling. Lady Cripps sent me a message from China through the Viceroy's Private Secretary to say that she would stop in New Delhi from 5th to 16th December. She was supposed to stay with the Viceroy. I specially went to Mr. Nehru to suggest that he should invite Lady Cripps to stay with him. Mr. Nehru accepted my advice and sent her an invitation to which the following reply came through devious routes:

'From British Consul General, Shanghai to Private Secretary to Viceroy, New Delhi. Following for Sudhir Ghosh from Isobel Cripps. Kind invitation from Jawaharlal received via Stafford. Delighted to accept. Due to arrive New Delhi December 5th.'

On arrival in Delhi Lady Cripps told me that Stafford would like me discreetly to find out from the Indian leaders whether they would like the idea of his coming out as Viceroy. Gandhiji was in the depth of Noakhali and a man of many sorrows. He could not be consulted. I did not talk to Mr. Nehru about it because I knew that he had many mental reservations about Cripps. I quietly went to Mr. Rajagopalachari who at that time used to live at No. 1 Clive Road as Industry Minister. Rajaji, a man of shrewd judgement, advised me to tell Cripps not to come out as Viceroy, because if he did he was likely to be discredited, as he was in 1942 when he, as Churchill's emissary, came to India and attempted to secure India's co-operation in the war effort. I conveyed it to Sir Stafford in a letter which Lady Cripps carried to London. Sir Stafford acted accordingly and found Lord Mountbatten. Mr. Nehru and Lord Mountbatten got on magnificently from the moment they were brought together by Cripps at a private dinner in London.

My exchanges with Cripps in those days of the collapse of a Government were of a more intimate character than my exchanges with the Secretary of State and on 15th December 1946 I sent him a long letter virtually setting out the views of the Congress leaders on the recent disturbing events in India. I explained the general feeling of regret that Pandit Nehru had agreed to go to London to discuss the situation with the Prime Minister, as the whole world had been given the impression that India might soon be plunged into a long period of civil war despite the best efforts of the British Government to overcome the difficulties between Congress and the Muslim League. I pointed out that, in fact, the British Cabinet had invited Congress to form a Government upon the acceptance by Congress of the Statement of 16th May but that the Viceroy, acting on his own initiative and against Pandit Nehru's wishes, had brought five members of the Muslim League into the Government, who promptly repudiated the Statement thereby presenting the British Government with a very awkward problem which they had not faced up to honestly. I also conveyed to Cripps Mr. Rajagopalachari's view that since the

basis of the Interim Government was the acceptance by the political parties of the Cabinet Mission statement of 16th May and since the British Government agreed that the Congress had accepted that basis in its entirety it would be logical and right to ask the Muslim League to accept the May 16 statement in plain language or to leave the Government.

I pointed out Mr. Jinnah's skill as a strategist; his determination to divide India and that he had already made great progress with his policy of violence and threats under the banner of 'Direct Action' which had resulted in the tragedies in Calcutta and East Bengal. I reminded Cripps of Gandhiji's remark that the British Government had been unnerved by the tragedy in India and that yielding to Mr. Jinnah was not the answer to the problem. At the same time I wanted Cripps to know that the difficulties confronting the British Government were honestly appreciated in India.

On the 27th January 1947 Sir Stafford Cripps sent me the following reply (see Plate 9):

*Board of Trade  
Millbank  
London S.W.1*

*27-1-47*

My dear Sudhir,

I have your letter and I think the logic of it is impeccable!

At the moment we are—and have been—wholly absorbed in the settlement of the Burma affair which we have just brought to what I hope will be a happy conclusion. We are all very much impressed by Aung San.

We shall be reviewing the Indian situation very shortly and I still have in mind the two suggestions I made to Jawaharlal and I hope they may materialize before too long. The suggestion of Rajaji we shall certainly consider as we always should, considerations coming from that very kind and helpful quarter. You can be assured that I will see that full attention is paid to them and please thank Rajaji very much for sending them along.

I am so glad Isobel was able to help. As you know I have a

very high opinion of her and I should find it difficult to get on without her help and advice!

We shall await with interest Jinnah's next step on the 29th but I don't anticipate that it is likely to be decisive. Then we shall have to make up our minds as to what we do.

All good wishes,

STAFFORD CRIPPS

PS. My kindest regards and all affectionate thoughts to Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai, Rajaji, Rajendra Prasad and the old man and all!

S.C.

When I received this letter from Cripps I took it immediately to Nehru. He read it several times over and said, 'This is a very important communication.' I then walked across the street to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's house and showed him the letter. He read it very carefully and gravely remarked: 'This is a very important letter.' The 'two suggestions' referred to in the letter by Sir Stafford were (1) his promise to Nehru that he would try his best to get Wavell removed from the post of Viceroy, and (2) that he would try and get Mountbatten appointed in his place. This letter was the first intimation from London that the British Government was contemplating the dismissal of Wavell. Not even Lord Wavell knew anything about it at that time. For when he got the orders later it was a genuine shock for him, and more so for George Abell, his private secretary, who led the coterie of British civil servants who had undone what Cripps had done by transferring real power to the majority in India and leaving to the majority the responsibility of bringing the minority into the Government.

The removal of Lord Wavell was a case of genuine dismissal. It was a very grave thing for the British Government to remove from office a Viceroy who had done nothing wrong. His only fault was that his soldierly talents were not equal to the highly complex problems of India which were political as well as human. The India Office civil servant who paid me a dubious compliment by saying that I was responsible for the dismissal

of the Viceroy meant that Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence trusted me and the long series of letters I had written to them in October-November-December of 1946 had convinced them that Lord Wavell was no longer equal to his job.

This is a brief outline of the story told in this book.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Gandhiji and the Seed Potatoes*

THE BENGAL famine of 1943 killed about one and a half million people. During this famine Gandhiji was a prisoner in the Aga Khan's Palace in Poona. When he was released on the 5th May 1944, due to a serious attack of malignant malaria, his first thought was to go to Bengal as soon as possible. But the War was still on and Calcutta was the headquarters of the stupendous military effort of the Allies against Japan. Bengal and Assam were virtually under allied military occupation. Movements of civilians, particularly in East Bengal, were rigidly restricted. Soon after his release my wife and I went to see Gandhiji along with Leonard Elmhirst of Dartington Hall, Devon, who was returning to England after a period of emergency service with Governor Casey in Bengal. Elmhirst, a close associate of the poet Rabindranath Tagore and an educationist of international standing, has been all his life a devoted friend of India. He founded Sriniketan, the Rural Development Institute of Santiniketan, and was one of the pioneers of the movement for revitalizing Indian villages. An agricultural economist (he is at present Chairman of the International Institute of Agricultural Economists), he was commandeered by Governor Casey to work out a development plan for harnessing the water resources of Bengal to change the whole face of the State. Upon completion of his assignment Elmhirst was returning to England and I thought it would be a good thing if he had a meeting with Gandhiji and conveyed to his friends in the British Government, such as Sir Stafford Cripps, his impression of the state of Gandhiji's mind and the possibilities of a *rapprochement* between Gandhi and the British. The two sessions he and I had with Gandhiji did not give much

of an indication about the possible course of Gandhiji's next political move; he talked most of the time about Bengal and the one and a half million who died of hunger and how he was unable to forget the sorrow of his inability to come and help in those unhappy days.

Physically he was very weak in those days and he was under medical treatment for malaria, but the thought of Bengal never left him. During the following months I had some exchanges of letters with him about his possible visit and the difficulties that stood in the way. I took up with Governor Casey the idea of Gandhiji's Bengal visit. Casey, being an Australian and a politician with very wide international political experience, was very different from the usual rigid British Governor in India. I explained to him that Gandhiji was eager to visit Bengal but he would never come if any restriction of any kind was imposed upon his movements. Casey was also eager to establish a bridgehead with the uncrowned king of India who had such amazing power over the hearts of hundreds of millions of men and women. The Viceroy was not favourably disposed to the idea but Casey's opportunity came when the Labour Government came to power in July 1945. In June Gandhiji was in Simla for the Conference of all the political parties called by Lord Wavell under Mr. Churchill's instruction, and he wrote to me from Simla the day after the Conference started on the 25th June to say:

*Manorville,  
Simla,  
26-6-45*

Bhai Sudhir,

I have been able only today to write a reply to your letter of the 11th June. You know all that I have been doing here. I am of course very eager to go to Bengal; but I must go to all the places I want to visit.

Blessings to Shanti and to you from

BAPU

With this brief letter in my hand I went to see Governor Casey. He said I could go and see Mr. Gandhi in Simla and

assure him that the Governor would do everything in his power to secure for Mr. Gandhi the freedom to go wherever he liked in Bengal and to meet anybody he liked. When I reached Simla and went to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's house to see Gandhiji he greeted me with the remark: 'Now tell me all about your exploits with Mr. Casey.' He was impressed to hear my report on Casey. At the end of the talk he asked me—quite unexpectedly—if I would like to travel with him in his third-class special train (that was the first time he used such a special train, consisting of a coach and an engine and a guard's van) from Simla to Sevagram instead of returning to Calcutta. I agreed to join him at Kalka. Soon after the train started he asked me to come and sit near him and said: 'I have taken to you. Would you like to do some work with me?' There was magic in those words and I became one of his regular 'apprentices'. Gandhi was, as the Bible says, a fisher of men.

There is a mud road that goes from Wardha to Sevagram; it crosses the Calcutta-Bombay railway line at a point; at that point the little third-class special train stopped especially for us. Gandhiji asked all of us, one by one, to get off first; he got off last and we walked the two miles of dusty road to reach the cluster of mud cottages which was his famous Sevagram *Ashram*. I stayed at the *Ashram* for a few days and my chief recollection was the conversation with him the evening before I was to catch the mail train for Calcutta. The Bombay-Calcutta train left Wardha early in the morning and to catch it you had to leave the *Ashram* at about 4 a.m. and walk about four or five miles along the muddy road (it was the rainy season) to reach the railway station. The previous evening before he went to bed Gandhiji called quite a conference of three or four people and wanted to make quite sure who was going to wake me up at 4 a.m. and who was to carry my suitcase and go with me to the station; he made quite certain that a kerosene lantern was there in my hut and that I was to carry it in my hand as I walked the four or five miles to the station in the dark. He had time for all that.

Back in Calcutta I pursued my job of pestering Mr. Casey.



It was then the month of July and by then the Labour Government had settled down in office in England. Casey was in a stronger position to have it his own way. He won the tussle with the Viceroy because of the support he got from the Labour Government in his proposal to start a dialogue with Gandhiji.

While I explained to Gandhiji the opposition of Lord Wavell to his visit to Bengal I pleaded in a letter to him that the Viceroy, although rigid, was a sincere man. I promptly got from him a letter in which he explained to me the definition of sincerity. He said:

*Sevagram*

28-7-45

My dear Sudhir,

I have your good letter.

A man is sincere in the sense that he is not knowingly dishonest. But if he makes up his mind hastily and will not deign to take the trouble to study accurately facts of each case, he is in fact untruthful without knowing that he is so. Such is the case with perhaps millions of Hindus. They sincerely believe that untouchability is a part of the divine plan. But they hug a provable untruth.

Of course I will see Mr. Casey first, if I succeed in coming to Bengal which I want to do as early as the rains permit.

I have the pamphlets.

My blessing to you both.

BAPU

I went to Sevagram to give Gandhiji the good news that the way was now clear for him to visit Bengal and he wrote his first letter to Governor Casey in which he said:

*Sevagram*

2nd August 1945

Dear Friend,

Shri Sudhir Ghosh kindly gave me copies of your two speeches, one of which I finished yesterday during moments snatched from my daily work.

I write this to draw attention to two things for the moment.

Cloth shortage you can deal with without delay by following the policy laid down by the All India Spinners' Association which is represented in Bengal too. In one sentence the scheme is to ask every home practically to spin its cotton and every village to weave its own cloth. It is the largest co-operative effort that can be conceived, in the world.

The second is the cattle question. For that you should meet Shri Satish Chandra Das Gupta of Khadi Pratisthan. He is ailing and may not be available just now. He has just published a monumental work on the question.

Shri Sudhir Ghosh has given me your message about my visiting Bengal. I thank you for it. I am anxious to come as early as the rains of Bengal will permit. When I come my first business will be to give myself the privilege of meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*His Excellency The Governor of Bengal,  
Calcutta*

But Gandhiji's visit to Bengal did not materialize before the 1st of December. The Congress party organization had gone to pieces since the imprisonment of all the top leaders in August 1942. The leaders who were now released were busy putting their house in order and Gandhiji was overburdened with political work and giving guidance to his lieutenants in revitalizing and reactivating the Congress organization. It was not easy for him to get away. His health also needed attention and after the rains he moved from Sevagram to Poona. In October he summoned me to Poona to discuss with him the details of his Bengal visit as it appeared to him that he could perhaps leave Poona for Bengal on 1st November for a two-month tour.

In the year 1945 the most prominent political leader of Bengal was a distinguished Gandhian, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, who was a member of the Congress High Command and later became Chief Minister of Bengal. The political leaders of present-day Bengal were not heard of at that time. Dr. B. C. Roy who later became prominent in Bengal politics

was at that time just on the fringe of it. The other eminent Gandhian social worker was Shri Satish Chandra Das Gupta, of Khadi Pratisthan fame, whose nickname in Bengal was 'Deputy Gandhi'. There were two groups of public men around the two leaders. Both these men were, in their own ways, saintly men and true disciples of Gandhiji. Both were equally close to Gandhiji, who had a great sense of affection for each. But the two groups around the two leaders did not have much Gandhian love for each other. Each group wanted to be in charge of the Gandhi tour of Bengal; whoever was entrusted with the responsibility of Gandhiji's arrangements was going to have great prestige. For what greater prestige could anybody have in India than to be trusted by Gandhi?

Gandhiji was in a predicament. He did not want to be involved in the political squabbles of Bengal. We Bengalis are individually very good; but we find it extremely difficult to be good to each other. Gandhiji summoned me to Poona to discuss his problem. He knew that I was not interested in the politics of factions. I have been all my life somewhat of an expert in the art of falling between two stools, with the result that I never prospered in politics. Gandhiji liked me for it. I had carried with me the draft of a Press announcement prepared by me and agreed to by Mr. Satish Chandra Das Gupta and slightly amended by Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, which read:

Gandhiji is coming to Bengal in the first week of November. On his arrival he will spend about ten days at the Khadi Pratisthan *Ashram* at Sodepur. Thereafter he will proceed to tour some of the Bengal districts. It has been decided that he will visit the Contai and Tamluk subdivisions of the Midnapore district, the Munshiganj subdivision of Dacca district and then Santiniketan.

Much as he would like to visit Assam and North Bengal, it is impossible to say at the moment whether he will be able to do it. It will depend entirely on the state of his health. If it is not possible for Gandhiji to visit Assam and North Bengal our friends there must understand.

More than 15 lacs [hundred thousand] of men and women of this province died of hunger in 1943 and Gandhiji was not free to come

and help. He has not been able to forget the sorrow of it. The aftermath of the famine is still there and there is fear of a second famine. Corruption and profiteering and blackmarketing and other forms of anti-social activities are rampant in the province and the dumb millions of Bengal are groaning under the burden of it all. Gandhiji wants to come and live amongst them, see their distress, share their sorrow and try and help.

After discussing the whole matter with me Gandhiji wrote on this draft statement with his own hand a brief message which he asked me to telegraph to Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Mr. Satish Chandra Das Gupta:

Sorry I have been obliged to postpone visit to Bengal by a few days. Am unable give exact date coming. Am anxious visit as many places as possible but regard being had to my health it may turn out to be as few as possible. Main thing is to study condition and share distress best of my ability. Would like final fixing programme after reaching Calcutta.

Gandhiji then dictated a longish letter to Dr. Ghosh in Hindi and asked me to take it back to the two Bengal leaders. It was a typical example of the Gandhian genius of complete frankness in dealing with a very delicate situation. Translated into English the letter read:

*Poona*

*18-10-45*

Bhai Prafulla,

I have received your letter and telegram about Jawaharlalji. I have understood the matter.

Sudhir came yesterday. I have had long talks with Sudhir yesterday and today. I was not able to send a telegram about my decision. It would have been too long. So I am sending this letter. Sudhir must have sent you a brief telegram.

Taking everything into consideration I feel that at this stage you let this much be known that 'due to unavoidable circumstances Gandhiji cannot come to Calcutta on the 2nd November. As soon as the date is settled it will be announced. It is likely that he will come in the last week of November or thereabouts. His tour programme which has been published

in the newspapers is also cancelled. But wherever he is likely to go, the organizers will be informed, so that they can make some arrangements. No expenditure of any kind should be incurred at this stage. Wherever he goes, his transport will have to be paid for, but that can be seen to at that time only. Gandhiji has made it clear that health permitting he will go to all the places he wanted to visit. But keeping his age and health in view, it is obvious that in spite of his desire to visit as many places as possible he will be able to visit only a few of them.'

You may publish this much. Now I will tell you what I want to do. If possible I want to visit Midnapore, Chittagong, Dacca, Barkamta, Santiniketan and Assam. If any other place is left out, like Feni, I would like to visit that also. You can inform the local organizers about my programme which you all decide for me. Transport also would have to be arranged. Do not give anything to the press yet. That can be done when my visit is definite. It takes a little time to make the preliminary arrangements. That is why I have suggested this. You can also work out what are the places I can go to easily.

I don't feel that it is necessary for me to let you know just now all who will be with me. If you want to suggest anything about this, you may do so.

I would like to meet the people who have already been to see me. If you want any more persons to meet me you may call them. Maulana Sahib\* is there in Calcutta at present. You should not trouble him; but if he wants to suggest anything, you should go to him and ask him about it.

I do not want to get involved in addresses of welcome. Gift of any amount of self spun yarn, or yarn spun by friends, will not be too much. My aim will be to convert it into Khadi and distribute it there at the cheapest possible price. Any gift of money will be welcome, but no special effort should be made for it. It should be voluntary. The money will be used for some constructive work in Bengal. But please remember, that this tour is neither for the collection of yarn nor for the collection of money.

\* Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

I must of course meet Mr. Casey and would like to secure from him whatever assistance may be available for the people. It has been my experience so far that wherever I go and settle down my presence gives the poor and destitute a sense of comfort. If I can do even this much, I will be satisfied.

I do not want to get involved in the politics of Bengal. I have neither the desire, nor the knowledge.

Whatever you decide in this matter should be decided unanimously by all of you, rather than by majority opinion. This is not the kind of thing which should be settled by majority opinion. If anyone interested in my proposed visit does not like a particular thing, then I do not want to do that. There must be no quarrel over my visit. My religion is to settle quarrels. Please give this letter or a copy of it to Satish Babu. My earnest wish is that even though you are two separate bodies, you should become of one mind before my arrival. You are both eminent disciples of the same Guru, a great Guru like P. C. Ray. What I want is to see you both truly united in heart. Both of you are doing my work. Then why should there be any difference between the two of you? But in all this God's grace is the great thing.

Blessings from

BAPU

Gandhiji arrived in Calcutta on 1st December 1945 in the afternoon. Governor Casey sent for me and handed to me this brief note of welcome for Gandhiji and suggested that I might arrange an appointment for the two of them to meet in a day or two:

*Government House  
Calcutta*

*1st December, 1945*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I am sending this note to you by the hand of Sudhir Ghosh to say that I look forward very much to seeing you whenever you feel you would like to do so—possibly tomorrow (Sunday) or Monday.

I expect that you will be a little tired after your long journey,

which I hope was as comfortable as possible, and that you were not too much bothered on the way.

I am,  
Yours sincerely,  
R. G. CASEY

Gandhiji said he was not going to wait for a day or two; he was going to call on the Governor that very evening. So I rang up the Governor to say that Gandhiji was coming within an hour. Casey did not imagine that the number one enemy of British rule in India could be so deeply courteous to a representative of the British Raj. Gandhiji, too, was touched by the solicitude of a British ruler. They went on talking with each other from 7 to 9.30 about everything under the sun—about Gandhiji's South African days, the inmates of Tolstoy farm, his experience with General Smuts—cabbages as well as kings. At 9.30 I intervened and said, 'Well, Bapu, I think we had better go now. I am sure the Governor has had no dinner yet.' He was distressed to hear that he had kept the poor man from his dinner; he had forgotten that British Governors did not have their dinners before sunset as he did.

The Governor's study, where he received Gandhiji, was on the first floor of the great mansion (it was the residence of British Viceroys before the capital moved from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911) and, as we got up to leave, Casey very politely came downstairs with us and escorted Gandhiji to his car in the porch. To reach the porch, he had to walk with Gandhiji from one end of the great hall on the ground floor to the other and to his great surprise the Governor found that the entire community of servants of Government House—gardeners, cooks, cleaners, messengers—about 200 in number, were silently standing in the hall in two long rows with their palms folded in reverence. Many of them were barebodied and such clothes as they had on them were not the clothes in which they were fit to be seen by the Governor. The news had gone round the servants' quarters of Government House that the Mahatma had come to see the 'Lord Sahib', and the servants thought it was their great chance to have a glimpse of the great father.

But they had not counted on the 'Lord Sahib' himself coming downstairs to bid farewell to the visitor; it was not done. They looked rather sheepish when they saw the Governor. Casey was surprised. Flourishing his hand at the assembled congregation he said to Gandhiji 'Look at all this. I assure you I did not arrange this.' Next day when I met Casey he said, 'You know I had the shock of my life—because most of these Government House servants are Muslims! I never knew that Gandhi had that kind of a place in the hearts of Muslims in this country.'

The Governor discussed with me the details of Gandhiji's tour in the districts of Bengal and asked me to tell Gandhiji that he knew that the people of Bengal would do anything for him but could he, as Governor of the Province, have the honour of playing host to so great a man by providing all the necessary transport for his tour. He handed me a very official looking note prepared by the Government's Chief Secretary which read:

(I) *Visit to Santiniketan and Rampurhat*

The E.I. Railway authorities have been asked and they have agreed to provide a separate third-class carriage for Mr. Gandhi and his party which will be attached to the ordinary trains.

(II) *Visit to Tamluk and Contai Sub-divisions*

A Government steam launch will take him and his party from Calcutta to Geonkhali (Tamluk Sub-division) at the entrance of the Orissa Canal. A Forest Department motor boat (having standing accommodation for 6 to 8 persons or sleeping accommodation for 2 persons) will take him in the interior. The District Magistrate will arrange Government cars where necessary.

(III) *Tour in East Bengal*

The B.A. Railway will attach a third-class carriage for him and his party in the train to Goalundo and from Chandpur. From Goalundo the party will travel by ordinary service steamer to Munshiganj (accommodation will be arranged). A Government steam launch will be kept ready at Munshiganj for Mr. Gandhi's use. He will go to Chandpur by the ordinary steamer (accommodation will be arranged by us). A launch or motor-cars will be provided by Chittagong, if required.



The points that will require clearing up are:

(i) The number of members in his personal entourage (it may be necessary to provide a second motor boat at Geonkhali for which over a week's notice is necessary).

(ii) *A firm tour programme.*

The tour programme which I have received seems to be provisional. It will be difficult to make arrangements if request for transport is received at the very last moment.

(iii) Perhaps it might be explained to Mr. Gandhi that Government transport is intended to facilitate the movements of Mr. Gandhi and his immediate personal entourage only.

Some day our children and our grandchildren would perhaps want to walk along the route which this man of God traversed in the villages of Bengal to kiss the dust of his feet. For they will want to know why Albert Einstein had said: 'In generations to come men and women will find it difficult to believe that such a man ever trod this earth.'

Gandhiji had to make some changes in this programme. He found that he could not do the whole of the proposed trip in the Midnapore district; he omitted Sutarehata (Basudevpur), Tamluk. He could not go to Dacca and Chittagong either; instead he went from Calcutta to Gauhati and Dhubri in Assam after his visit to Midnapore. Gandhiji first went from Calcutta to Diamond Harbour and from there to Mahishadal in Midnapore and from Mahishadal to the little town of Contai in a small launch provided by the Forest Department of the Government. It took us one whole morning to do this canal trip of about twenty miles. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children assembled on both sides of that canal along the entire twenty-mile route. It was a moving spectacle. Gandhiji was particularly anxious to be in Contai. He spent several days there. This was the area of Midnapore which had been devastated by a cyclone and a tidal bore in October 1942. It was an extraordinary natural phenomenon which had never happened in that part of the world before. A tidal wave from the sea, twenty feet high, roared into the district one night in the midst of a cyclone and several hundred villages lay under twenty feet deep sea-water for days together; in due

course the angry sea returned to its normal place but all the water in those hundreds of villages became saline and there was nothing for human beings or for cattle to drink. The entire crop of the area was destroyed. The war had first priority over the transport system of the country and it was difficult to transport foodgrains from other parts of the country to that area, and that was how the terrible famine in Bengal started.

For the whole of the year in 1943 I had worked on famine relief in the Contai sub-division of the Midnapore district under the auspices of the Friends' Ambulance Unit from the U.K. and the U.S.A. A group of dedicated young men and women who were pacifists in Britain and America had offered to do this famine relief work in lieu of military service. At the instance of Horace Alexander, the distinguished Quaker friend of Gandhiji, I had joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit in India and worked with them in this part of Bengal during the famine and its aftermath. In the midst of the starvation and death all around us I met a very attractive young woman, a young doctor, who along with half a dozen other young women medical graduates had come from Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, to do famine relief work. That was how my wife, Shanti, and I found each other. The population of Contai Sub-division was about 700,000 when I arrived there in February 1943; when a year later I left Contai it was reduced to about 500,000! When I left after a year's work in the villages of Contai a group of local youths gave me a little farewell party and one of them insisted on making a speech in English, in my honour, for the benefit of my British and American colleagues. He explained what a good chap I was and how grateful the people of Contai were to me and added very solemnly that Mr. Ghosh had 'organized the famine' very efficiently. With the population reduced from 700,000 to 500,000 in a year the famine had been organized very efficiently indeed!

Gandhiji's main function during this tour was his prayer meetings. Every day at 5 o'clock in the evening he sat down in the open for his usual daily prayers and we, the members of his entourage, sang his favourite devotional songs; at the end of it

he invited the vast congregation of 200,000 or 300,000 men, women and children to join him in singing *Ramdhun*, the praise of Rama, the favourite name for his God. It was an amazing spectacle in a vast open space. Men and women (often carrying small children in their arms) started from their remote villages in the morning and walked miles to reach the prayer meeting at 5 p.m.; they ate the little food they carried from home, on their way, and took rest under the trees. In the peace of the open countryside in the light of the setting sun this vast assembly clapped their hands in unison and sang the praise of Rama, the Lord of the Universe. I used to sit there with Gandhiji in the midst of this moving phenomenon and wonder what it all meant to those hundreds of thousands of simple villagers. Obviously it meant something to them to be in the presence of this unusual spirit.

On return to Calcutta from Midnapore Gandhiji had some more meetings with Governor Casey. Gandhiji's principal secretary, Mr. Pyarelal, has described these meetings in his book *The Last Phase*, as 'an oasis in the desert of long estrangement with British officialdom since the latter had declared war on the Congress'. But the 'officialdom' in Delhi was still on the war path; they did not at all approve of the excessive hospitality extended to Gandhi by the Australian Governor of Bengal. They did not like either the Gandhi-Casey meetings. Their resentment came up on the surface very soon. Every year in those days the British Viceroy paid a visit in December to Calcutta to address the annual meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India. This was the annual gathering of the British mercantile and industrial community in India and this annual function of powerful Britons assembled in their full glory was considered so important that successive Viceroys made their important policy pronouncements before this gathering. For the December 1945 meeting Lord Wavell (and his private secretary George Abell) came down to Calcutta and stayed with Casey at Government House. Before the Viceroy left Delhi Casey very innocently suggested a meeting between the Viceroy and Gandhiji because he thought it would be a good idea for Lord Wavell to have a friendly

chat with Gandhiji as he himself was having every few days.

At the Associated Chambers meeting the Viceroy said:

‘Quit India will not act as the magic sesame which opened Ali Baba’s cave. There are various parties to the settlement who must somehow or other reach a measure of agreement among themselves—the Congress, the minorities, the Muslims, the Rulers of Indian States, the British Government.’

The spirit of it was very different from the spirit of the Gandhi-Casey meetings. The Viceroy and his officials were disturbed about these meetings, and the Viceroy’s private secretary, George Abell, handed to me a draft Press statement and asked me to show it to Gandhiji before it was issued and before the Viceroy met him: It said:

‘There has been much speculation about the interviews between the Governor of Bengal and Mr. Gandhi, and about the forthcoming interview between the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi. As such speculation may lead to misunderstandings and to doubts whether negotiations with a single party are being undertaken or are contemplated, it is considered that an official statement to the contrary is desirable. There is no intention of entering into any negotiations with any party at this stage. The Viceroy has always been ready to see the the leaders of the principal parties, to hear their views and to establish personal contact with them, but negotiations must wait till after the elections.’

Gandhiji had not asked for an interview with the Viceroy; it was only a friendly suggestion from Governor Casey. Gandhiji did not feel happy about this statement but politely suggested that two sentences be added to the statement, which he dictated to me:

‘But, in Mr. Gandhi’s case, the Viceroy, coming to know that Mr. Gandhi’s stay in Calcutta synchronized with the Viceroy’s visit there, was desirous of meeting Mr. Gandhi again and talking to him on several matters about which he had been corresponding with the Viceroy. This desire Mr. Gandhi has appreciated and there will be a meeting between them on Monday.’

The Viceroy and George Abell refused to add the two sentences to the statement, much to the embarrassment of Governor Casey. This was a minor affair but this spirit was the curse of Indo-British relations in those days.

But Gandhiji was unconcerned. He was not interested in talking politics either with the Viceroy or with anyone else. His only desire during the six weeks of his Bengal-Assam visit was to be in the midst of the people, the villagers, and to give them whatever comfort and succour his presence meant to them. Large groups of the villagers used to come every day to see him at the *Ashram* at Sodepur, north of Calcutta, where he was staying. He used to spend hours listening to their problems of ploughing and plantation and seeds and irrigation and crop failures. One bright December morning I was suddenly summoned to the little enclosure in the open where he used to get his daily oil massage lying on a wooden platform. He was lying completely naked in the sun on this wooden platform inside the little bamboo enclosure and Kanu Gandhi, his grand-nephew, was giving him the oil massage. For him this was a good time for quiet thinking in his crowded day. As I walked in, he opened his eyes and said that he was very distressed that morning because a large group of potato-growers from the Hooghly district had come to see him; they were in great trouble because the season for planting seed potatoes was almost over and they had found it impossible to get seed potatoes from the big dealers in the traditional potato market of Calcutta at Posta; if they could not get seed potatoes, somehow or other, within a few days, they would lose the year's potato crop and their families would starve.

'You have got to do something about it—and it has to be done today,' said Gandhiji with emphasis. He added, 'You say this Governor, Mr. Casey, is a good man. Well, I will know that he is a good man if he can find these seed potatoes for the villagers.'

As soon as he finished his massage and his bath he sat down to write a letter to the Governor about seed potatoes:

*Khadi Pratisthan,  
Sodepur  
8th December 1945*

Dear Friend,

I write this with the greatest hesitation. The more I see and hear, the greater is the grief over the happenings in Bengal. Here is a sample demanding immediate attention.

Satish Babu brings me the story that potato growers cannot get seed potatoes and the planting season will be over in a week's time. Seed potatoes are there in the market under Government control. But the grower cannot get them.

There is evidently something radically wrong if the news brought by Satish Babu is true. I wonder if you can do anything. You were telling me about the clever Mr. Dey whose services you have enlisted for such matters. Can you make him over to me or some other officer who can attend to this immediate affair?

I am having this letter delivered at once. The question is small enough on the large Bengal canvas but is all in all to the poor growers whose livelihood is at stake.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. The Governor of Bengal,  
Calcutta*

With the letter in my hand I ran along to Government House and demanded an interview with his Excellency. In those days Governors were considered to be very big people. It was unheard of that a young man could just walk into the private secretary's office and say that he must see the great man immediately. It was not done. And J. D. Tyson, Secretary to the Governor, was a senior civil servant who did not approve of this sort of anarchy. 'Are you sure you have something important to discuss with His Excellency? What do you want to say to him?' I said that I wanted to talk to the Governor about seed potatoes. 'Seed potatoes? What has the Governor of Bengal got to do with seed potatoes? Don't be silly,' said the respectable Tyson. Thereupon I produced the letter written by

the Mahatma with his own hand and marked 'immediate'. Tyson was squashed and went into the Governor's room next door and told him that I wanted to see him about seed potatoes. He came back in a second and said the Governor would be glad to see me. 'Hullo, Sudhir, what is it that I hear about seed potatoes? Tell me all about it,' remarked the Lord Sahib as I walked in. I handed to him Gandhiji's letter and explained to him how the poor potato-growers of Hooghly had come to see him about their problem of seed potatoes. The Governor said he knew all about politics in Australia and in Britain but in his long political career he had never been called upon to find seed potatoes. 'But I will do all I can,' said His Excellency and rang for Mr. Tyson, Secretary to the Governor. 'Tyson,' said the Governor very solemnly, 'for years and years you have been a district officer in Bengal. Surely you know all about seed potatoes? Well, for goodness sake, get busy then and find out where we can get seed potatoes. It has got to be done today. Mr. Gandhi is very upset about it.'

Tyson scratched his head and suggested that perhaps the best thing to do was to send for the Agriculture Secretary, Subimal Dutt. Within a few minutes Mr. Dutt (who later in life became Foreign Secretary and India's Ambassador in Moscow) arrived looking very anxious, for it was a serious thing to be sent for so suddenly by the Governor. It was settled in this conference on seed potatoes that Mr. Dutt and I were to proceed to the Posta potato market in Nimtolla, North Calcutta, and Mr. Dutt was authorized, as Secretary to Government, to use the emergency powers of Government to seize whatever stocks of seed potatoes existed there and have them distributed amongst the villagers at the legitimate price. The scarcity of seed potatoes had been artificially created by the stock-holders, who were profiteering at the expense of the poor villagers and were demanding exorbitant prices which the potato growers could not afford to pay. When the big holders of potato stocks saw the robin-red-breast *chaprassis* and policemen following no less a man than Secretary to the Government, they got frightened. The honourable Secretary Sahib stood on a packing box in the middle of the market and read

out a flimsy piece of paper on which he had hurriedly written:

‘I, Subimal Dutt, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, by exercise of the power vested in the Governor of Bengal under the Defence of India Rules do hereby seize all stocks of seed potatoes in this market. And I do hereby affix my seal of office to this notification.’

The Secretary had not remembered to take with him a seal of the Government. So he drew a circle on the piece of paper and described it as the seal of Government and signed his name below.

The flimsy piece of paper was promptly pasted on a wall of the market by the robin-red-breast *chaprassis*. For a moment I feared that the shopkeepers might not take any notice of the notification. But the effect was instantaneous. I thought it was more due to the *chaprassis* than to the Secretary who was a rather thin-looking gentle sort of Bengali. The stock-holders became very reasonable and meekly disgorged their hoarded stock of seed potatoes at the legitimate price. We stood there in the market for the whole day and watched with great pleasure the villagers taking away cart-loads of seed potatoes. Like boy scouts, after a day’s good deed, we reported in the evening to the Governor and to the Mahatma that 250 maunds (about 5,000 kilos) of seed potatoes had been distributed to the growers that day. The old man was overjoyed. He was proud of my exploit. For the next week or two every distinguished visitor who came to see the Mahatma, including the great Nehru, had to hear first the story of the seed potatoes!



## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Loneliness of Love*

THE POLITICAL capital of India moved to the little *Ashram* of Khadi Pratisthan in the village of Sodepur, north of Calcutta, from 1st December 1945 to the middle of January 1946 because of the presence of Gandhiji there. He made the Sodepur *Ashram* his base of operations for his trips to the interior of Bengal and Assam. Political leaders from all over India started pouring into Calcutta and descended on us every day at the *Ashram*. The evening prayer meeting was a daily festival for many thousands. In spite of his heavy preoccupations in Bengal Gandhiji managed to pay a visit to Assam. The visit to Assam had to be brief. Gandhiji and those of us who were with him stayed at Sarania *Ashram* of Shrimati Amal Prabha Das, a former inmate of Sevagram *Ashram*, just outside the town of Gauhati. His son, Manilal Gandhi, had come over from South Africa after an absence of many years from India. Manilal devoted his life to South Africa to carry on his father's work. He was a simple soul and he often poured out his complaints to Gandhiji about the way he had neglected his own family. Gandhiji had his own definition of his 'family'. His family did not consist of his own children; it consisted of a number of men and women who lived and worked with him and shared his joys and sorrows. His sons felt neglected. One evening a girl of Gandhiji's entourage fell sick; she had some sort of fever, nothing serious. But immediately Dr. B. C. Roy, the great physician of Calcutta, came down to examine the girl and to arrange for all necessary medical attention. Everybody was anxious to go out of his way to pay attention to any one of us who was a member of Gandhiji's 'family'. When Manilal saw all the fuss that important men made about Gandhiji's

honorary family he gave his father a long lecture one evening on the way he had failed to take care of his real family. Manilal commented somewhat bitterly that life with Bapu was rather comfortable and cosy. The gentle father patiently listened to all that Manilal had to say and remarked in his soft voice: 'Manilal, if life with me was so comfortable then all my sons would not have left me.'

As Manilal left the room Gandhiji said to me: 'Poor Manilal, he does not understand. Why don't you take him to Shillong tomorrow for a trip. It is a pretty place. Do go to Shillong for the day and take Manilal with you and enjoy yourselves. It must be very boring for you to spend all your time with an old man.' So to amuse Manilal I borrowed a car from one of the many people of Gauhati who were all attention to us and drove up the sixty miles of mountain road to reach Assam's beautiful mountain resort. It was lunch-time and we were hungry. So we cheerfully drove down to the 'Pinewood' hotel, the well-known hotel of Shillong, and settled down in the dining-room and called the waiter to order lunch. The waiters seemed embarrassed and looked at each other but would not take our orders and after patiently waiting for some time we asked for the manager. The Indian manager of the hotel came out and politely told us that nobody other than a European could have a meal in the 'Pinewood' hotel. It was in the year of our Lord 1946. Manilal angrily reported to his father in the evening that even South Africa seemed more enlightened than Assam in the matter of colour prejudice. But I was impressed to see the gentleness with which Gandhiji reacted to our report; he looked sad but there was no trace of resentment in him. He was only unhappy because our fun was spoilt by some hotel manager.

Before leaving Calcutta for Assam he had written a letter to Governor Casey about several hundred political prisoners who were in prison in and around Calcutta.

*Khadi Pratisthan  
Sodepur  
5th January, 1946*

Dear Friend,

I have to thank you for the arrangements made by the officials for my travel to and stay in the Midnapore District.

The Superintendent of the Presidency Jail writes to me to say that Shri S. Bakshi would like to see me. I am therefore bound to see him. This will be only after my return from Assam. I wonder whether I could see at the same time the other prisoners who are there.

Shri Sudhir Ghosh tells me you would like to see me on Monday next. I shall give myself the pleasure of doing so at 7.30 p.m. that day.

I must thank you too for the relief to the Electric Corporation employees.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Governor of Bengal,  
Calcutta*

I accompanied Gandhiji to the Dum Dum Central Jail, the Alipore Central Jail, the Presidency Jail and in each place he would sit down with the political prisoners for hours for lengthy political discussions about the country's future. Most of the prisoners were men who did not have any great faith in Gandhiji's non-violence. But after all he was the father who cared—whether they accepted his non-violence or not.

I was given the job of pestering Governor Casey until the security prisoners were all released. Mr. Casey was winding up his affairs in Bengal and getting ready to go back to Australia and to politics. I am quite good at pestering people on such occasions and did not leave the Governor alone. The result of my exercises, however, came a fortnight later after Gandhiji had left Calcutta and reached Madras. Governor Casey wrote on the 1st February to say:

*Government House  
Calcutta  
1st February 1946*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I am sorry to add to your burdens by bombarding you with letters, but in the stress of cleaning up the office here, I am writing to you about the several matters that we have discussed as they mature.

This is just a note to say that I authorized the release during January of 41 of the security prisoners. About another 50 will be released during February. The process of release of all those that it is any way safe to release will be continued hereafter.

25 lbs. weight of fine scoured Australian Merino wool arrived by air from Australia a few days ago—and I had it packed more securely and dispatched straightaway to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur at her address in Simla.

Australia has given me 200 bales of wool (worth about a lakh of rupees) for the Indian Red Cross in Bengal. I believe this large quantity of wool is now on the water between Australia and here. It will be sold at cost price and distributed so far as possible to hand-spinners and weavers in this province—and the proceeds will go to the Indian Red Cross, which will concern itself in the future almost entirely (and after June 1946, entirely) with the big task of civil relief in Bengal.

I venture to enclose copy of a short broadcast that I made last night in this connection.

With best wishes to you.

I am,  
Yours sincerely,  
R. G. CASEY

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.,  
Hindustani Nagar,  
Madras*

Gandhiji's journey from Bengal to Madras is a story in itself. The obvious way to travel from the little *Ashram* at Sodepur, north of Calcutta, to Madras was to sit in a car and drive about fifteen miles to the Howrah Station on the other side of the

river and sit on a train that travels from Howrah to Waltair and Madras. Governor Casey had offered Gandhiji a special train from Howrah to Madras as an act of courtesy. But like a child Gandhiji at times had extraordinary wishes. As we were packing up and getting ready to leave, Gandhiji said to me one evening that it would be nice to sit on a train right there at the little Sodepur Railway Station just outside the *Ashram* and to travel all the way to Madras in the same train without a change. But Sodepur, on the East Bank of the Ganges, was a little suburban station outside Calcutta, on the Bengal-Assam Railway. On the West Bank of the river there was an entirely separate railway system, the Delhi-Calcutta line of the East Indian railway and the Madras-Calcutta line was another system known as the Bengal-Nagpur railway. Nobody had ever taken a train from the Bengal-Assam Railway on the East Bank of the river to the East Indian Railway on the West Bank and from it to the Bengal-Nagpur system. He had often watched the suburban trains coming every hour or so from Calcutta or from the opposite direction to the little Railway Station outside the *Ashram*, and he thought it would be great fun to sit on in his third-class coach at Sodepur and go all the way to Madras in it.

Members of the *Ashram* all declared that such an arrangement could never be made. I told Gandhiji that I would certainly go to the Railway authorities and find out if such a journey could be arranged. I presented myself to the office of Mr. N. C. Ghosh, General Manager of the East Indian Railway, and asked him if he could not arrange for the Mahatma's little third-class special train to start from the little railway station at Sodepur on the Bengal-Assam Railway, cross the Ganges from the East Bank to the West Bank by the Bally bridge to reach the East Indian Railway, and then at some point cross over from the East Indian Railway to the Bengal-Nagpur Railway and then on to Madras. The railway chief had never heard of such a novel proposal. Nobody had ever done such a thing. The Bengal-Nagpur railway from Western and Southern India and the East Indian Railway from Northern India converged on the terminus at Howrah station; but nobody knew if there was a track by which a train could be

taken from the East Indian system to the Bengal-Nagpur system at some point near the terminus. Mr. Ghosh called a conference of the three Chief Engineers of the Bengal-Assam, East Indian and Bengal-Nagpur Railways and mechanical drawings and records were called for. It was finally discovered that there existed a track in the big goods yard near the Howrah terminus, called Shalimar goods yard, a track joining the two railway systems but nobody ever used it. Since it was mechanically possible the railway men decided to put in commission this extraordinary route for travelling fifteen or twenty miles; they were prepared to do anything to satisfy the childlike desire of the Mahatma. So they cleaned up the disused railway track in the Shalimar goods yard and tested it, and the Mahatma's third-class special did start from the little wayside station of Sodepur; then it crossed the river to reach the East Indian Railway and through the Shalimar goods yard to the Bengal-Nagpur Railway and travelled on and on to Madras!

From Madras Gandhiji returned to Sevagram in the first week of February. The British Parliamentary Delegation, who met Gandhiji at Madras and with whom I got attached, left New Delhi for England on the 9th February. I saw this lively bunch of warm and friendly people off at the Willingdon Airport in the afternoon. In the evening a telephone call came from George Abell, the private secretary to the Viceroy. When I met the P.S.V. he made an unexpected request. He said the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had returned that afternoon from the drought areas in South India and was very worried about the food situation. He wanted to see Gandhiji and to consult him about the food crisis. Abell asked me if I would be prepared to take a letter from Lord Wavell to Gandhiji next morning and do my best to persuade Gandhiji to come and see the Viceroy in New Delhi to discuss with him how best to handle the food situation in the country. In the early morning of 10th February I sat in lonely splendour in a military Beechcraft and proceeded to the Nagpur Airport with this Viceregal letter in my hand.

*The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
9th February 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

My Private Secretary has talked to Mr. Ghosh about the food situation, and Mr. Ghosh will explain it to you. I have just returned from a tour in the south of India and in my view a great many lives may depend on the attitude of the political parties to such administrative steps as we may take to economise in foodgrains and make the necessary food available for the people in the drought-affected areas.

If you can make the journey to Delhi I should very much like to talk to you about the whole question.

Time is important in this matter and if you can make the journey at once I shall be most grateful.

Yours sincerely,

WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

At the Nagpur Airport a huge limousine from the Governor of the Central Provinces was waiting for me. After driving forty-six miles on a dusty road I reached Wardha and asked the Deputy Commissioner of the district if he could provide a more modest vehicle to take me from Wardha to the Sevagram *Ashram*, for the Governor's limousine with the chauffeur in his beautiful livery would hardly fit into the *Ashram* atmosphere. I was rather confident that Gandhiji would respond to the Viceroy's appeal for help despite the bitter political conflict of the past. But I was mistaken. Gandhiji refused to come. He firmly told me that I was not to try to persuade him to go to Delhi in response to the Viceroy's suggestion. He took me to task for having acceded to Lord Wavell's request to carry his letter to Gandhiji at all and immediately wrote a letter to the Viceroy pointing out the 'physical and moral reason' for his refusal; but he indicated his willingness to discuss the subject with an official representative of the Viceroy who could speak with authority on the Viceroy's behalf.

*Sevagram**10th February, 1946*

Dear Friend,

Shri Sudhir Ghosh has handed me your kind note of 9th instant. You will believe me when I say that I would have responded to your invitation at once if I could have. But I have explained to our mutual friend physical and moral reasons for my inability. He will explain them fully to you and will also put before you my proposition. Of course I shall be glad to meet any representative you may send.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Viceroy*

Even in Sevagram there was a telephone.

I conveyed to George Abell on the telephone Gandhiji's reaction to the Viceroy's proposal and Abell flew down to Nagpur on the 11th February and travelled from there to Sevagram with another letter from the Viceroy:

*The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi*

*10th February, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

I am sorry you are unwell after your Madras tour and hope a little rest will soon put you right.

You suggested that as you could not come to Delhi yourself I might send someone to you to discuss the food situation. I welcome the suggestion and am sending Abell. He knows my mind and will tell you what I would have said if we had had the opportunity of a discussion together.

I am asking Mr. Jinnah to see me here on the same subject as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*



George Abell tried out all his debating skill. But it was no use. The old man was very firm. There was a fly in the ointment. The Viceroy's letter said: 'I am asking Mr. Jinnah to see me here on the same subject as soon as possible.' Abell had brought with him the draft of a joint appeal to the people of India about the imperative need of saving foodgrains and growing more food to meet the crisis; and the idea was that the appeal should be signed by Gandhiji, Mr. Jinnah and the Viceroy. The implication was that Gandhiji as the representative of the Hindus of India and Mr. Jinnah as the representative of the Muslims of India were, under the auspices of the third party, the British Viceroy, appealing to their respective communities to co-operate with the Government in dealing with the serious food crisis. The Viceroy knew that with all his unlimited power in India his words carried no weight with the people of the country, and the bureaucrats around him were clever enough to see the value of roping Gandhiji into this work. But it was the same old game of parity between Hindus and Muslims, between Gandhi and Jinnah, even when the country was under the shadow of famine. If it was considered necessary to ask Mr. Jinnah the head of the Muslim League to sign this joint statement, the appropriate man to sign it on behalf of the Congress Party would have been its President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. But in the mind of the British bureaucrats, under whose guidance Lord Wavell functioned, Gandhi was the chief representative of the Hindus of India and Jinnah was the chief representative of the Muslims of India and between the two of them they represented India. To this sort of treatment Gandhiji's objection was, as he said in his letter to Lord Wavell, 'moral'. Physically, too, he did not look at all well; but that would not have deterred him from travelling from one end of India to the other to help the Government to handle the food crisis, had the 'moral' objection not been there.

So Gandhiji very firmly turned down the Viceroy's proposal. I fully understood his reason. But I was somewhat dismayed by the vehemence of his rejection. In the process of it all I received from Gandhiji a severe lecture. Dr. Rajendra Prasad

who was staying with Gandhiji at the *Ashram* joined in the discussion. It was the evening of 10th February; I was waiting for George Abell, who was coming down from Delhi the next day. For over an hour Gandhiji and Dr. Rajendra Prasad reviewed the whole Indian political scene and I listened quietly to all that they said to me. What bothered me was Gandhiji's repeated statement, in the course of this long conversation, that he distrusted the word of British officialdom in India and advised me to do likewise. After all God had given us brains and He wanted us to use them. He told me that I was not to be 'thrilled' by the attention that was being paid to me by men in high authority like the Viceroy. This hurt, though there was no lack of fatherly love in what he said. He was merely warning someone he cared for deeply. It was fascinating to watch his mind working—it was such an honest mind that it allowed you to see the entire process of its working and it held back no part. Most men talk to conceal as well as to express their thoughts. Gandhi talked only to express them. That was part of his uniqueness.

The child in me was bruised by the paternal advice. As I flew back to Delhi with Abell on the 11th and travelled from Delhi to Calcutta the next day I brooded over what Gandhiji had told me about the need to distrust British officials. I was seized with an unusual sense of loneliness. I went home to Calcutta and talked to my wife about it. For days I was unhappy and on 16th February I wrote a letter to Gandhiji to unburden myself:

*11 Lovelock Place  
Ballygunge P.O.  
Calcutta  
16 February, 1946*

Dear Bapu,

On my return to Delhi on the 11th evening I got the news of serious riots in Calcutta and I left the next morning for Calcutta in the hope that I might be able to persuade those in authority to adopt reasonable measures instead of being obstinate. I saw the Governor and did all I could.

At Delhi I gathered from Abell that they had already put out the news that you were unable to come and see the Viceroy because of health reasons. You had asked him to say that you had other heavy commitments. Abell said he was going to telephone to Sevagram and apologize for the mistake.

During the conversation I had with you at Sevagram you talked about 'distrusting' one's friend. I pondered over it after I left Sevagram. It made me feel that I ought to say something about what I am trying to do and why. It is difficult to talk about it. But I enclose a letter which a young English woman wrote to me when I left Cambridge. I hope you will have a look at it in a spare moment. She was a Quaker and a deeply religious person. We worshipped together in the Friends' Meeting House during our three years at the University. You know how young people get drawn towards each other and become fond of each other. We were very fond of each other; but we succeeded in keeping this friendship free from any sentimental bonds. She says in this letter: 'You have not chosen to do anything easy and I fear that, humanly, you will often be lonely. But you have a source of strength which will not fail you in the worst trials and desolation. If my friendship can help I shall be more than glad and shall send you my love as I do now.' She helped me to understand the good that is England, and Cambridge gave me the inspiration to work for peace between the British and the Indian peoples. When I left Cambridge in the summer of 1940 she sent me a copy of the *Oxford Book of Mystical Verses* along with this letter. I experienced when I left Sevagram this time something of the 'loneliness' which she talks about in the letter. I know you will understand what I am trying to say.

Shanti was glad to have me back home. She has asked me to send you her love.

There are many other things regarding Delhi and Calcutta about which I would have liked to write but a talk is better for such things. Mr. Casey has asked me to see him again tomorrow. I will certainly see if I cannot pursue with him some of the matters about which you wrote to him.

I noticed some difference between your health as I saw it in

Madras and as I saw it in Sevagram a few days ago. I hope your stay at Poona repairs the loss.

Love,

SUDHIR

My letter provoked Gandhiji to write on 24th February an editorial in his *Harijan* under the title 'Not Lonely' which appeared in the issue of 3rd March 1946:

### NOT LONELY

(By M. K. Gandhi)

A friend wrote to me the other day how lonely he felt in the midst of company. This remark was prompted by my telling him that I distrusted the word of the official world. He did not, and had thought that I might share his trust. Behold his disappointment when he found me wanting. It may be that was not what he meant by his cryptic letter. Anyway that was my interpretation and I replied that as a man of God he must never feel lonely. For, God was ever with him. Why should he care even if the whole world deserted him? Let him trust in spite of me, as long as the trust came from his heart and not his head.

I feel differently. Mutual trust and mutual love are no trust and no love. The real love is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distrust him. I have found reasons for distrusting the English official world. If my love is sincere, I must love the Englishman in spite of my distrust. Of what avail is my love, if it be only so long as I trust my friend? Even thieves do that. They become enemies immediately the trust is gone.

To me Gandhiji wrote a letter on the subject (which I seem to have lost) and told me in his own inimitable language the story of the Prophet Mohammed and his disciple Ali, both of whom were hiding from their persecutors in a dark cave. Ali was afraid and said to his master, 'We are alone.' The master said: 'We cannot be alone. For God is with us.'

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Gandhiji and a Life of 125 Years*

**W**ITHIN A week of my return from Sevagram to Calcutta the British Labour Government announced in the House of Commons, on 19th February 1946, that a Mission consisting of three Cabinet Ministers would shortly proceed to India. On the 1st of March I read in the newspapers that Woodrow Wyatt, the young British M.P. who was one of the members of the Parliamentary delegation that had earlier visited India, was coming out to India again with the Cabinet Mission as Personal Assistant to one of the Members, Sir Stafford Cripps. Wyatt and I had become friends. I warned him, and through him Sir Stafford Cripps that, as I understood Gandhiji's mind, any attempt by the British Government to settle the issue of Pakistan would lead to a disaster in India.

Before the Cabinet Mission left England I conveyed this friendly warning to Wyatt in a letter dated 1st March 1946, in which I told him of Gandhiji's view of the present efforts of the British Government to settle the issue of Pakistan, and of Gandhi's refusal to travel to Delhi to discuss the problem of the food crisis with the Viceroy. I made it clear to Wyatt that Gandhi considered the division of India into two separate states as a 'cowardly solution' and I reminded him of Gandhi's description of Cripps's offer in 1942 as 'a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank'.

In addition I told Wyatt that, after my recent talk with Gandhi and with Dr. Rajendra Prasad at Sevagram, I felt certain that the only possible solution was for the British Government to hand over power to the majority in India and to rely on it to find a way of coming to terms with the Muslims and other minorities. This would have to be done by the use of force, or in other words, the combined might of the British and Indian majority, as represented by Congress, would be able to

keep the joint forces of the Muslim League and the Communists in order. If force was coupled with wisdom and the majority was more than just and more than fair to the minorities it might be possible to find a working arrangement for the future. Any alternative plan would without doubt create an upheaval—I added a postscript in which I suggested to Wyatt that he might show my letter to Sir Stafford if he would like to do so.

Wyatt replied to say, in a letter dated 11th March 1946, that the three Cabinet Ministers to whom the letter was shown were not particularly encouraged by it!

*17 Chatsworth Court  
London W.8.*

*11th March 1946*

My dear Sudhir,

Thank you very much for your long and interesting letter. It has been circulated to the three Cabinet Ministers. I doubt if they're very encouraged by it!

I have rather changed my views on what I think should be the first approach from the British angle, mainly as a result of there being a Cabinet Mission. Three Cabinet Ministers ought to be able to do things which one Viceroy alone might find difficult. The sort of lines on which I personally am thinking now is that in the first place we should really try and 'get off your backs' as Gandhi puts it.

More of this when I see you—which I'm very much looking forward to.

We start off in Delhi but I hope we don't stay there because it will be very hot.

One thing I do feel very urgently is that the old man must be got to come to any negotiations that there are. Then he will be able to see for himself that the thing is genuine and that there is no wish on anybody's part to do anything but transfer power.

Yours ever,

WOODROW

*Sudhir Ghosh, Esq.,  
11 Lovelock Place,  
Ballygunge P.O.  
Calcutta*

The Cabinet Mission arrived in New Delhi on 24th March 1946 and sent for me on the 28th, on the strength of what Governor Casey had said to them about my relations with Gandhiji. On the afternoon of the 28th I presented myself to George Blaker, Private Secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps.

The office of the Cabinet Mission was set up in the South Wing of the Viceroy's House. While I was talking with George Blaker in his office, Sir Stafford Cripps walked in with some papers in his hand. George said, 'Sir, this is Mr. Sudhir Ghosh.' 'Oh, yes,' said Sir Stafford, 'come into my room for a few minutes,' and I followed him. I had heard all kinds of stories about Cripps, about his austerity, frostiness and his air of intellectual superiority. So I was a little nervous in this first encounter with him, but quite unexpectedly (I did not know what exactly Casey had said to him about me) he opened up within a few minutes. 'Could you do something to help us? We find that according to the arrangement made by the Viceroy for us we are not going to see Mr. Gandhi until 10th April, that is after about a couple of weeks. We are rather unhappy about it. The first man we wanted to see upon our arrival here was Mr. Gandhi. Now that the programme has already been announced by the Viceroy and invitations have already gone out I do not know if Mr. Gandhi will agree to come now. But we do not like this idea of seeing a whole lot of other people before we can see him. Do you think you can fly to Poona or wherever he is and persuade him to come immediately to Delhi?' I said, 'I can try, but I do not know whether Gandhiji will agree.' So he immediately took paper and pen and wrote down the following letter to Gandhiji.

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House, New Delhi  
28th March, 1946*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I am most distressed to hear of the muddle that has occurred about your invitation to meet us next week. As you well know I am looking forward immensely to seeing you again and to having the benefit of your wise advice in these difficult times.

I have promised Agatha Harrison to attend her special time of quiet thought and prayer on Sunday next and I had hoped very much indeed that you might be there too so that we might together join in a short time of spiritual harmony. I do hope very much that it will be possible for you to be present there and that would also give me an opportunity of calling upon you for an informal talk before we meet you in a more official atmosphere.

I hope in any event to have more than one occasion of talking with you as I feel the very heavy burden of our present efforts and the necessity for all the help that we can have and no help can be more welcome and wise than that which you can give.

Yours very sincerely,

R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

He read out the letter to me and asked me if I thought it was all right. It sounded very sincere and persuasive. I explained that Gandhiji was at that time living in a little village called Urulikanchan, thirty miles south of Poona, and that I would go to him and convey to him the eagerness of the Cabinet Mission to see him immediately.

As I got up to go, F. F. Turnbull walked into Sir Stafford's office and said that the Secretary of State would like to have a word with Mr. Ghosh before he left. So I had my first encounter with the Secretary of State too. I was much impressed with the gentleness of this elderly Englishman. He asked me if I would very kindly take a letter from him to Mr. Gandhi. I said, 'I would be glad to do so.' He sat down and wrote the following letter and handed it to me.

*2, Willingdon Crescent  
28th March 1946*

My dear Gandhiji,

I am greatly looking forward to seeing you again to renew the acquaintance and friendship which began some 40 years ago when you came to lunch with us in Clement's Inn.

As the meeting fixed for Wednesday afternoon will be



devoted to matters of high policy it would add greatly to my pleasure if you could spare time and come to see me less formally at the above little house for a chat beforehand.

I understand 7 p.m. is a very good hour for you and I should be happy to see you then either Sunday or Monday next. As a matter of fact I am free all day Sunday if any other hour would suit you better.

Before I left home my wife told me if I saw you to give you her very best wishes.

Ever sincerely yours,

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

The Secretary of State said that he had requested the Viceroy to make the arrangements for me to fly to Poona and that the Viceroy's Private Secretary, Mr. George Abell, would get in touch with me in the evening. George Abell informed me that he had great difficulty in finding a place on the plane next morning to Bombay. In those days, air services were controlled and all seats were normally reserved for military personnel. The Viceroy's Private Secretary explained at some length how he had pushed out some military officer to make room for me. A car from the Viceroy's garage was to call at the house in Barakhamba Road where I was then staying at about 4 a.m. to take me to the Palam Airport. I got up with some effort at this terrible hour, got ready for the journey, and walked up and down the verandah of the house waiting for the Viceregal vehicle but there was no sign of it. I was somewhat impatient and rang up the garage of the Viceroy's house and some sleepy voice at the other end was heard saying, 'The car will start in just a couple of minutes.' By the time it arrived I was very annoyed with the chauffeur and gave him a bit of my mind because it looked as if I would not be able to catch the plane. He apologized profusely for oversleeping and we made a dash for the airport. When we reached the airport, the plane had just left. The Royal Air Force Officer (Palam was under the control of Royal Air Force at that time) in charge of the station was quite exasperated with me. He said that he had detained the plane for ten minutes because he knew that I was

going on an important mission, but it was entirely my fault that I had missed it.

So I pleaded with the R.A.F. officer that I really must reach Poona that morning somehow and that he must arrange something for me that morning. He said that if I waited for an hour there might be another plane. I was cheerlessly waiting when after half-an-hour the officer came up to me and said, 'Well, it is just as well you missed the plane. The plane is coming back to the airport. It has developed some serious engine trouble.' Within another half-an-hour he came back to me in great distress and said that they had just got the news that the plane had crashed and burst into flames. They were all shaken by the news. The majority of the passengers were young women, members of the military nursing service which seemed to make it more poignant. We gathered later that there was not a single survivor amongst the passengers of the ill-fated plane.

The young R.A.F. officer was very resourceful. He somehow got hold of a 6-seater Beechcraft and put me on it as the sole passenger, and gave instructions to the pilot that I was to be taken direct to the Poona military airfield without stopping in Bombay because I was on an important mission to Mahatma Gandhi. Within a few hours I reached Poona and found my way by road to the little village of Urulikanchan. The first thing I did was to blurt out to Gandhiji with some excitement the story of what had happened, even before I handed to him the letters of the Secretary of State and Sir Stafford Cripps. He listened to my tale and very solemnly said: 'This means that you are going to live for 125 years!'

He then read the two letters and thought over what the two British Cabinet Ministers had said. 'Do you seriously think that I should change my plans and go immediately to Delhi?' I said that I was rather touched by the eagerness of these two Englishmen to see him as early as possible and I felt that Gandhiji should respond to their eagerness. He pondered over it for a few minutes and, half talking to himself, said 'Nothing hangs by it; but since you are so anxious that I should go, well, I will go. I can start after prayers and the evening meal.'

The Viceroy's Private Secretary had given instructions to the

Railways that if a gentleman by the name of Sudhir Ghosh called on the Station Superintendent at Poona Railway Station a special train was to be laid on wherever he wanted it. I was impressed to see the solicitude of the Station Superintendent as soon as I called at his office and announced my name. I explained that Mr. Gandhi was to start that evening for Delhi from the little wayside station at the village of Urulikanchan, thirty miles away from Poona. There would be thirteen persons in the party and Mr. Gandhi wanted only third-class railway accommodation for them.

So the Station Master organized a little special train consisting of one third-class coach with an engine in front and a little guard's van at the back. We started rather late in the evening and told the engine driver that Gandhiji would get off at Bombay for a couple of hours in the morning. So he cleverly held up at Dadar just outside Bombay without waking us up, and on our morning arrival at the platform we were met by a full contingent of Gandhiji's Bombay disciples headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. We were whisked off to North Bombay in the Harijan quarters and I was surprised to see the elaborate arrangements made for our brief halt at such short notice. There was a stir in the political air. Obviously Gandhiji's journey to Delhi in response to the special invitation and the cancellation of the Viceregal arrangement aroused intense interest in political circles. There were great expectations; and the journey was heralded as a historic one.

The journey by special train was not quite so fast as one would have expected it to be. It stopped at all kinds of little railway stations, for news had spread all over India that Gandhiji was on his way to New Delhi. It was extraordinary how quickly the news of his movements could spread and how people got to know the time the train passed each station. The Station Masters were only too willing to co-operate with the demand of the crowds that the train be stopped for the Mahatma's 'darshan'. Signal men obligingly raised the signals at all stations and the engine driver had to stop. My friends in Gandhiji's party treated me as a kind of special representative of the Viceroy and every time the train stopped they demanded

an explanation from me. In sheer exasperation I joined the engine driver and travelled with him on the engine instead of sitting in the third-class coach. I told the engine driver not to stop even if he was directed by the Station Masters to do so. He ignored for a few stations the crowd standing on the railway line to stop the train and hooted his way through; the railway people realized that we were not to be stopped so frequently. Even so it took a special train more than twenty-eight hours to travel from Bombay to Nizamuddin Railway Station, Delhi.

We drove straight from Nizamuddin to the Bhangi Colony in Reading Road where Gandhiji's headquarters had been set up among the sweepers of the New Delhi Municipality, by the side of a little temple dedicated to Valmiki, the god of the Harijans. Within an hour of our arrival I was with Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Pethick-Lawrence at No. 2 Willingdon Crescent. Sir Stafford came immediately to the Bhangi Colony, arriving just in time for the 5 o'clock prayer meeting. The Secretary of State said he was eager to see Gandhiji at 7 p.m. Gandhiji, the soul of courtesy, replied that he himself would call on the Secretary at 2 Willingdon Crescent.

Next morning Gandhiji said that I must go and pay our railway fares to the Viceroy's Private Secretary. I hesitated because the special train was laid on by Government for Gandhiji's convenience and there was no question of paying any fares. But he insisted that we must pay our fares. So he calculated that 3rd class fares at the rate of Rs. 27/6 annas for thirteen persons would be Rs. 355/14 annas and gave me the money with instructions to pay it to the Viceroy's Private Secretary. So off I went to George Abell, the P.S.V., to pay for our tickets. The Private Secretary to the Viceroy in those days was an important man and he did not like this nonsense about having to collect railway fares. He growled 'What the hell do you mean by paying me this money? Am I a blessed station master? And who wants your old man to pay any money anyway. It was a special train laid on for him by the Government. Who wants him to pay the money?' So I explained to friend George that the old man in question was a man with a very strong will of his own and it was no use refusing to accept

the money. The old man would normally have travelled by third class and would have paid for the members of his party and he was not going to be under any obligation to the Viceroy of India. So George Abell said, 'All right then; if your old man wants to pay he should pay the cost of a special train from Poona to Delhi.' He rang up the Railway Board and gave me a rough estimate for a special train from Poona to Delhi: about Rs. 18,000. George said that there was no question of paying any money but if Mr. Gandhi insisted on paying then the amount to be paid was Rs. 18,000.

So I went back to Gandhiji to explain that if he wished to pay he would have to pay Rs. 18,000. He firmly rejected the Viceregal proposal. His logic was perfect. He would normally have paid third-class fares by an ordinary train for thirteen persons, i.e. Rs. 355/14, and that was his legitimate debt to the Railways; he had never wanted to travel by special train but if the Government wanted to fetch him in a special train to suit their own convenience it was the business of the Government, and Gandhiji was not concerned with it. So he was not going to pay for this special train but he insisted that the Government must accept payment for thirteen persons at the third-class rate. So back I went to the P.S.V. and said 'Well George, old boy, you had better take the money. I know my old man. If you think you are going to beat him in this argument you are very much mistaken.' The P.S.V. quietly took the money dictating a letter to the Chairman of the Railway Board to say that the money was being sent to him with the compliments of Mahatma Gandhi.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Painful Quest for Peace*

GANDHIJI HAD a nick-name for the three of us—his two Quaker friends, Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander, and myself. Whenever the three of us together walked into Gandhiji's room in the Bhangi Colony on Reading Road, New Delhi, he would look up from his work and smile and say, 'Ah, here comes the Trinity; you are entitled to sit down. But in Quaker silence. As you can see, I am busy.' After finishing whatever he was working on he would say with a twinkle in his eye, 'Now, you can tell me all about your exploits with the British Cabinet Ministers.'

The late C. F. Andrews was perhaps closer to Gandhiji than any Indian; Agatha Harrison was a devoted friend of Charlie Andrews and that was how she came to know Gandhiji back in 1932 during his visit to London for the Round Table Conference. Agatha was the Secretary of a small group of Quakers known as the India Conciliation Group. Another eminent Quaker, Carl Heath, was the Chairman of the society and among its members were distinguished Quakers like Horace Alexander and Jack Hoyland, who used to teach at the Quaker College, Woodbroke, in Selly Oak, Birmingham, and some of the members of the Cadbury family. The base of operations of this organization was in Friends' House, Euston Road, London. They were a small group of dedicated English men and women whose interests were totally un-political. Together they represented talent and intellectual calibre of a high order and religious perception of a unique character. The pacifist genius of the Quakers was the special bond between them and Gandhi. Gandhi's non-violence and Quaker pacifism were in substance the same thing; the origin of Gandhi's faith was his Hindu

religion and the practice of it was the singing of the praise of Rama, the favourite name for his God, while the Quakers developed their pacifist faith from the life of Jesus. But Gandhi and the Quakers met on a plane where religion mattered less than things of the spirit.

I was drawn towards the Quakers when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge in the middle 1930s. I worshipped with them in the Meeting House in Jesus Lane on Sunday mornings. I found peace and enrichment in the silence of those meetings. Although I was a Hindu I was accepted by the Quakers as a Quakerly person, a sort of honorary Quaker, and when I found my name printed every term in the list of resident Quakers in Cambridge I rather liked the Quakerly mistake. It was in those student days that I was drawn towards the India Conciliation Group in London. In fact I organized an India Conciliation Group amongst the Cambridge undergraduates on the Quaker pattern. It consisted of a bunch of young Quakers in the University and a number of other British undergraduates of the Quakerly type (one of them, Eric Pyle, is now President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge), and I was the only Indian in it. We met every Sunday for a Group lunch in each other's rooms during autumn and winter, during spring and summer in the open on the river anywhere between Cambridge and Rupert Brook's village of Grantchester. Lunch of course consisted only of large quantities of soup and bread and butter and marmalade, for, as undergraduates, we never seemed to have any money.

The Chairman of the Group was the great scientist, Sir Arthur Eddington, who was also a Quaker. He was the most silent of all Quakers I have so far come across in England or the United States. I used to see Sir Arthur regularly every Sunday morning sitting modestly in one corner of the worship meeting in Jesus Lane. In all the three years I worshipped there he never opened his mouth. The rest of the members of our Group (including the girls) were very far from silent. We organized all sorts of meetings and group discussions to make Gandhi and the demand for Indian Independence better understood by the members of the University, junior as well as senior. Apart from

Sir Arthur Eddington, some of our other supporters amongst the dons were Dr. Alex Wood, Tutor of my College, Emmanuel, Professor Charles Raven, Master of Christ's (both eminent British pacifists outside the Society of Friends), and Sir Ernest Barker, University Professor of Political Science. In one of our big public debates on India I even got the redoubtable Krishna Menon to come down to Cambridge from the India League in London; his opponents were Sir Hugh O'Neil, the Tory Under-Secretary of State for India under Mr. L. S. Amery, and Sir Alfred Watson who, as Editor of the *Calcutta Statesman*, was a target that the Bengal terrorists narrowly missed. The undergraduate hearts of the young Britons were delighted to see how effectively this colourful Indian with his flowing micn squashed the two top-level British Tories. Krishna Menon single-handed was more than a match for the two of them. That was of course a couple of decades before the Battle of the Thagla Ridge where Krishna Menon by proxy met the Chinese Communists.

It was my interest in the work of the India Conciliation Group in London that brought me close to Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander. Agatha became an honorary mother to me, and her flat at No. 2 Cranbourne Court, Albert Bridge Road, on the Thames opposite Chelsea, my English home. It was indeed a second home for many Indian students of those days including Indira Nehru, who was then studying at Somerville College, Oxford. Because of this old Quaker association I joined Horace Alexander and a group of young British pacifists of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, who came with him to do cyclone and famine relief work in Bengal, in 1942-3. Later, in the Cabinet Mission days in Delhi and Simla in April-May-June of 1946, the three of us worked together as Gandhi's 'Trinity'. It was a moving experience for us to be trusted by both sides in negotiations involving the fate of a country of 400 millions. It was a particularly touching experience for me, an Indian, to be trusted by the gentle Lord Pethick-Lawrence and the austere Sir Stafford Cripps. Their only reference was what Governor Casey had said about me. While it was exhilarating to be trusted by both sides it was



painful to watch from day to day two groups of high-minded men, one British and one Indian, heroically struggling to trust each other and failing to do so.

Gandhiji arrived in New Delhi on 31st March in response to the special request of the two British statesmen to have informal talks with them, although the Viceroy had invited him to meet the Cabinet Mission only on 3rd April. After these informal and formal meetings were over Gandhiji did not know what more was expected of him. He thought he should perhaps go back to Poona or to Sevagram to his own work since he had already given the Cabinet Mission whatever advice he could in their complicated task of negotiating the transfer of power to India. Their negotiation with the Congress Party was to be carried on with a negotiating team headed by the Congress President, Maulana Azad. Gandhiji had told the Secretary of State at the end of his long informal talk with him that if the Cabinet Mission considered it to be helpful he would be prepared to have a personal talk with Mr. Jinnah, to which Lord Pethick-Lawrence replied in a letter dated 4th April 1946:

*Office of Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
4th April, 1946*

My dear Gandhiji,

When you and I met at my bungalow on Monday last and again at the office on Wednesday you were good enough to say that if we thought it would be helpful you would be prepared to have a personal talk with Mr. Jinnah.

I still feel that the time may come when it will be of great value that you and he should meet and I know that Mr. Jinnah would be equally pleased to see you. But my colleagues and I have come to the conclusion that the position has not yet sufficiently clarified itself to make it likely that a meeting between you now would result in any substantial agreement.

I feel that I should communicate this view to you without delay as it may affect your plans and I could not ask you to stay in Delhi indefinitely.

May I add my personal pleasure at seeing you again and my thanks for the friendly help you have already given to us.

Sincerely yours,

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

When I saw this letter from the Secretary of State, I felt that the Secretary of State had not understood the value of keeping Gandhiji in Delhi although his letter was prompted by courtesy and consideration and nothing else. So I quickly went to Sir Stafford and pointed out to him the mistake of allowing Gandhiji to go away from Delhi and urged him to do everything in his power to have him stay. I knew that Gandhiji would be willing, but only if the British Ministers wanted him to do so. Sir Stafford at once saw the sense of what I was driving at and wrote this letter in spite of what the Secretary of State had said on the same day:

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
4th April 1946*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I hear that there is a chance of your extending your stay here and I do very earnestly ask you to do so.

We have still a number of interviews with separate interests and sections to carry out before we can come to the closer negotiations with the principal parties interested. This is therefore a time of formulation of possibilities and I know how valuable your influence will be upon persons of all kinds who seek your advice. As soon as the closer negotiations start I am sure we too shall want to seek that advice and we should indeed most sadly miss your help if you were to leave.

It is not I but India that needs you in New Delhi. Please stay.

Yours very sincerely,

R. STAFFORD CRIPPS.

Gandhiji replied to say:

*Harijan Mandir*  
*5th April 1946*

Dear Sir Stafford,

Many thanks for your affectionate letter. Sudhir has given me your message too. I am here at least till the 16th instant at Maulana Saheb's behest.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Sir Stafford Cripps*

I not only delivered this note of warm friendliness to Cripps but brought back another friendly little note from him to Gandhiji to say:

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation*  
*The Viceroy's House*  
*New Delhi*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I am so very glad to hear that you are staying on. The long list of your callers shows how much you are appreciated by us all!

Yours very sincerely,

R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

That was the type of bridge-building between the two sides that I attempted day after day as the negotiations went on for weeks and months. It was thrilling to watch their progress towards each other, and very distressing to see how they failed to achieve their objective in spite of the anxious efforts they made to reach each other.

Good old Agatha, who was everybody's mother, organized a Sunday morning Quaker Worship meeting in New Delhi, sometimes in a little hall of the Modern School of Barakhamba Road and sometimes in a ground floor room in the Y.W.C.A. on Asoka Road where Agatha was staying. Mr. Pyarelal, Gandhiji's Principal Secretary refers to these worship meetings and says in his book *The Last Phase*:

'The silent communion of the Friends is broken when one or

another in the gathering feels a call to share his "concern" with the rest. On this particular occasion one of the Indian friends in the company broke the silence by recalling the memory of Charlie Andrews who was the "silken bond of the spirit between the good that is England and the good that is India".'

It so happened that the 'Indian friend' who spoke was me. Gandhiji was moved by the words I said and he added his own words to them and wound up his remarks in that worship meeting by expressing his hope that Charlie Andrews' labours in the cause of Indian independence would 'prove sufficient ransom for what British Imperialism may have done to India'.

While the two Quakers and I laboured after our fashion for Gandhiji on the one side and the British Ministers on the other, furious negotiations were going on all around us. From the 1st to the 17th April 1946 the three Cabinet Ministers together with the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, interviewed 472 Indian leaders of all shades of political opinion in 182 sittings. That was some negotiation! Cripps who was the brain and the moving spirit behind it all had some individual meetings with some of India's ablest men. One of these was a meeting on 10th April with the late Sir N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar (later a Cabinet Minister under Mr. Nehru) whose background was that of a Civil Servant, one of the ablest produced by India. He had extensive experience of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, where he was Prime Minister. The record of this talk, hitherto unpublished, gives a clear indication of the way the mind of the Cabinet Mission was working at that stage.

*Cripps*: 'I am glad you have come for this chat. Let us have a free and frank talk. Will you let me have your appraisal of the situation.'

*Ayyangar*: 'It is too soon to give any definite appraisal. Day to day developments are as much within your knowledge as mine. So far as I am able to say, you and the Mission have come out with two objectives—the setting up of a machinery for framing the new constitution and the formation of a interim government at the Centre. Are you hopeful of solving both the problems on this visit?'

*Cripps*: 'I am quite hopeful. I can tell you that we do not mean to go back from this country without solving both of them.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Cutting across both these problems is the issue of Pakistan. If you are hopeful of solving both these problems, it means that you have in the first instance to reach a decision on the issue of Pakistan.'

*Cripps*: 'Yes, you are right. I would only add that we propose to reach a decision on that preliminary issue by bringing about an agreement.'

*Ayyangar*: 'The prospects of an agreement do not seem to look bright. You have, no doubt, been reading the statements and interviews given recently by Mr. Jinnah and the speeches which have been made at the Muslim Legislators' Convention.'

*Cripps*: 'Of course, I have. They breathe fire and brimstone. But you can take it from me that they do not disturb us. I am quite accustomed to such things in my own country.'

*Ayyangar*: 'That may be so. But the effect of such statements and utterances may not be the same in this country as it is in your country with seasoned politics.'

*Cripps*: 'When I find a person getting louder and more violent in his denunciations of his opponents I get the feeling that he is beginning to realize that the extreme case for which he stands is becoming desperate.'

*Ayyangar*: 'I am very glad that the Mission whose advent to and presence in this country are the immediate provocation for these intensified denunciations is not taking them at their face value. But you were mentioning that you hoped to reach a solution on Pakistan by agreement. In the present temper of the two main parties, particularly of the Muslim League, it is difficult to see how an agreement could be reached.'

*Cripps*: 'Has not the issue been reduced to a narrow one? The question is about the machinery for the administration of common subjects like defence, foreign affairs, etc. Jinnah says that arrangements for their administration should be made by treaty between Pakistan and the rest of India. The Congress says you must have a federal centre for administering them. The gulf between these two points of view is by no means unbridgeable.'

*Ayyangar*: 'But are not the two points of view fundamentally different? The one is thinking of two independent sovereign states having treaty relation with each other, while the other is thinking in terms of a single federal state in which these common subjects would be assigned for administration to a Centre.'

*Cripps*: 'That of course is so; but where differences of opinion of

such a nature do crop up it is quite possible for the two parties to come to an agreement if only they will meet, sit down and try to arrive at a solution by a process of give and take. From my experience I could tell you that the issue in dispute and the difference to be reconciled cannot be considered too difficult for arriving at an agreed solution. In international affairs, much bigger issues between Governments have been and are being settled by that process. It will be necessary for the Congress and the League each to come down a bit and meet.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Where are they to meet? What is the half-way house that you want them to meet at?'

*Cripps*: 'There is something like a confederation and a confederal Centre.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Would not a confederal Centre mean merely a gathering of representatives of Governments of Independent States?'

*Cripps*: 'Yes.'

*Ayyangar*: 'And there would be no legislature or other auxiliary things which you find in a Centre of the usual type?'

*Cripps*: 'No.'

*Ayyangar*: 'What about the sanction behind the decision which such a confederate machinery will take?'

*Cripps*: 'No doubt it will be a loose unit. But it is unnecessary for me to point out to you that the States of the American Union formed first a confederation which later on developed into a federation. There is no reason why a similar thing should not happen in India.'

*Ayyangar*: 'But you forget, however, some rather fundamental differences between the two cases. In the case of America the States were independent units which first formed a loose kind of union. They found that union did not satisfy their requirements and therefore developed the closer federal union that now exists. In India we have now a unitary state with a common Centre. You propose to scatter the units in this State.'

*Cripps*: 'Oh, no, no. I am not scattering them.'

*Ayyangar*: 'When I said you are now scattering them I did not intend to convey that you wanted to do so. I am only trying to put to you my understanding of the proposal that you apparently have under consideration, of forming a confederal union between the proposed Pakistan and the rest of India. To resume what I was saying, the units of the existing unitary Indian State will, if the Pakistan idea is accepted, be scattered and then given the option of grouping themselves as they like into two or more independent

States and come together in a loose confederation in the hope that later on the deficiencies of such a confederal arrangement will compel them to convert the confederal into a closer federal, union. In other words the ultimate development visualized is, so far as inter-relations between the units and the administration of common subjects are concerned, to bring them into more or less the condition in which they are today.'

*Cripps*: 'I see your point, but if agreement has to be arrived at we cannot altogether justify an acceptable or accepted solution on the basis of argument alone. We have got to take psychological considerations into account. All the same I do not wish you to take away from this conversation the idea that I am finally committed to the solution being found in the shape of a confederation.'

*Ayyangar*: 'I understand, but what psychological considerations are you thinking of?'

*Cripps*: 'Rightly or wrongly the Muslims have now very widespread amongst them the fear of Hindu domination and if India is to get on peacefully in the future they have to be convinced that the political system that is to be set up will be one which removes this fear.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Certainly everything must be done that is in reason possible for removing this fear. But in the conditions of this country and taking into account the number of Muslims involved and the manner in which they are distributed, it is difficult for anybody to agree that the removal of this fear can be accomplished only or even most successfully by setting up an independent State where, though the Muslims may be in a majority there will be a very large population of non-Muslims to reckon with. What are the grounds for your hope that an agreement could be reached between the parties and how could the reaching of such an agreement be furthered?'

*Cripps*: 'Between you and me, I may tell you that in spite of all the violent speeches that have been made within the last two days at the Muslim Convention, leading representatives of the Muslim community are, even as we are talking now, furiously thinking as to how best they could moderate their published demands so as to arrive at a settlement with the other party.'

*Ayyangar*: 'The effective way of making them climb down from their extravagantly high perch is for you or the other members of the Mission to give Mr. Jinnah as early as you can a broad hint that there is no likelihood of Pakistan being agreed to by the Mission or His Majesty's Government.'

*Cripps*: 'No doubt that would be effective. But the time is not yet for our making known even in an informal way what might be our ultimate decision even if we had reached one already.'

*Ayyangar*: 'I should have thought that there could be no hesitation in the matter. With all the background of your history in this country, I find it impossible to imagine how if you were asked to give a fair decision your judgement would be in favour of dividing the country into two or more independent States.'

*Cripps*: 'I quite appreciate your point of view, but where agreement has to be arrived at, it may be necessary for the party even with the strongest case agreeing to accept something less than what it may rightly be considered entitled to in order to avoid a possible decision against them. Often in my practice at the Bar parties with a very strong case for whom I was appearing have come to me and said "no doubt our case is very strong, but we do not know what the judge might finally decide. Meanwhile the other side is offering to compromise on terms which though less than what we are rightfully entitled to are still sure and certain. We have to place this against a possible adverse finding of the judge. Shall we accept those terms?"'

*Ayyangar*: 'If the two main protagonists do come to a settlement, nothing could be more satisfactory. But the danger of a compromise is that the terms may be such, especially when they are dictated by pressure from a third party, as would not in the long run satisfy or be in the interests of the one party or the other or perhaps even both.'

*Cripps*: 'There is that point no doubt, but hasn't it happened in Indian History already that the country has settled down to decisions which when given did not please any party, as the Communal Award, for instance.'

*Ayyangar*: 'The Communal Award has no doubt been acquiesced in, though everybody, not excluding the Muslims, has been loudly complaining against it. But its successful enforcement is due primarily to the fact that the British have been in power and also strong enough to force down even an unpopular decision of that sort. The conditions will, however, be very different if on the issue of Pakistan you give a decision of a similar nature. India will be declared independent. You will not be here to face the risks that will inevitably follow such a decision. You will not be doing a service to the country by giving a decision which will intensify communal conflict and lead perhaps to a civil war, the responsibility



for tackling which will not be yours. So any decision that you give has more chance of being implemented successfully after you leave if it is one which is justifiable on merits. If on the other hand it is one which attempts merely to decide the dispute between two antagonists by denying to each a portion of his claim, whatever the merits may be, it will leave a trail of trouble behind.'

*Cripps*: 'I agree that there are risks but we are determined to see that a settlement is reached, and if it is not reached by agreement between the parties, to give a decision ourselves.'

*Ayyangar*: 'If the parties in this country do not come to an agreement, the British Government which is in power today cannot escape the responsibility of giving a decision. There are suggestions for arbitration.'

*Cripps*: 'I know, but if the parties concerned agree to refer an issue like Pakistan for decision to a committee consisting of a Russian, a Turk, and a Chinese, I cannot see why we should stand in the way. No doubt in view of all the connexions that exist between us and India and the knowledge that we possess of conditions here there is justification of your view that the British should give a decision; but if the parties to the dispute themselves prefer to agree to abide by the decision of an outside committee of the sort I mentioned, I cannot see why we should stand in the way. The main thing is the reaching of a settlement which both parties will accept.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Sir Stafford, as regards the constitution-making machinery I presume you will agree that you cannot have two constitution-making bodies—or I understand the suggestion has been made of two compartments of a single constitution-making body—unless the decision is first taken in favour of Pakistan. Such a decision necessarily implies that provinces will have to decide beforehand which constitution-making body or compartment of a single constitution-making body they will go into.'

*Cripps*: 'Yes.'

*Ayyangar*: 'Similarly, Indian States will have to choose in this way.'

*Cripps*: 'Yes, but we cannot rule out the possibility in that case of the Indian States wishing to have a constitution-making body of their own!'

*Ayyangar*: 'Are you contemplating seriously these complications?'

*Cripps*: 'There are complications, but the whole thing will depend upon the agreement reached on the question of Pakistan. That hurdle has to be crossed before everything else.'

*Ayyangar*: 'How do you propose to set up the constitution-making

body. What is the authority which will constitute it. By Act of Parliament?"

*Cripps*: (After some hesitation) 'I am afraid we have not thought this out. I should not think that an Act of Parliament is necessary for this purpose.'

*Ayyangar*: 'If not an Act of Parliament, there should be at least a proclamation by the King. The matter is big enough not to be left to be provided for by a press communiqué of the present Government of India or even by an announcement by the Viceroy.'

*Cripps*: 'We shall no doubt go into this question. The main thing is that we should reach an agreement first on the issue of Pakistan. When such an agreement is reached we shall take the best advice that is available and implement it in the form most suitable.'

*Ayyangar*: 'What about the Indian States? Do you think they will come in without standing out for things which it might be difficult to agree to.'

*Cripps*: 'I do not foresee any great difficulty from that quarter.'

*Ayyangar*: 'What about paramountcy? Where will it rest after you transfer power?'

*Cripps*: 'Paramountcy when we go will have to disappear. When India gets independence not only British India but every one of the Indian States will become independent.'

*Ayyangar*: 'All the 562 or 601 of them?'

*Cripps*: 'Yes, and when they so become independent, it will be for each of them to negotiate fresh arrangements with the new Government of India.'

*Ayyangar*: 'This will be another additional complication which you will introduce as the result of your quitting power in India. It is difficult for me to think that you should expect 562 States each to negotiate separately a new arrangement with the Government of India. Even now there are only about 40 States with treaties and they as well as the rest of the States are all really held together by the British power exercising paramountcy.'

*Cripps*: 'But it is difficult to expect a State like Hyderabad with permanent treaty relations with the British Crown to agree to any arrangement decided over its head. It might well say: "Whatever you and the new Government may do we refuse to recognize it."'

*Ayyangar*: 'It is difficult to believe that an Indian State even if it be Hyderabad, could maintain the position that it will not acquiesce in the arrangements which are made by the paramount power.'

*Cripps*: 'You are probably right, in saying that even Hyderabad

could not *maintain* such an attitude for long. But we cannot ignore our obligations. What is it that you yourself would suggest?’

*Ayyangar*: ‘The natural thing. British power over Indian States is exercised through paramountcy. You are transferring power to Indian hands. The authority which takes your place in British India should exercise that paramountcy after you hand over power.’

*Cripps*: ‘That is not the law.’

*Ayyangar*: ‘Wasn’t it law in 1858 and in 1935?’

*Cripps*: ‘But surely if bad law was perpetrated in the past you would not expect us to follow that example now.’

*Ayyangar*: ‘You are not squarely facing the problem. That bad law has been in force and all States have settled down to it for nearly a century.’

*Cripps*: ‘We have certain obligations to States under paramountcy—protection for instance. We were able to discharge this obligation because there was the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force at our disposal. But the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force will not be available after India becomes independent. It would not be right for us to tell the States that as we are quitting India we are handing over our obligations to a new Indian Government which will not have such forces at its disposal and which therefore will not be in a position to implement those obligations. It is for the States to look out for themselves and if they are so minded, to make fresh arrangements with the new Government of India.’

*Ayyangar*: ‘What do you mean when you say that the new Indian Government will not be in a position to implement their obligation of protection to Indian States?’

*Cripps*: ‘It is obvious that the new Government will not have at its disposal a Navy and Air Force sufficient to defend even itself.’

*Ayyangar*: ‘You are exaggerating the position. It is true that the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force have to be greatly developed before they can be considered efficient parts of the armed forces of an independent India. But while they are being developed new India will certainly make other arrangements, for example by treaty with Britain, for having at its disposal their Naval and Air units to help her in defending the country. Defending the country will include defending the Indian States as well and it should not be impossible so to make arrangements with Britain that the new Indian Government will be in a position to implement the obligations of paramountcy which it will inherit from the British power. Again, you surely do not think that in protecting Indian

States British power had to place any reliance worth mentioning on the Navy and Air Force. That protection was largely given by the Indian Army and, even from the commencement of the new régime, we shall have, according to the Commander-in-Chief, an Indian Army which would be quite capable of providing fully for the internal defence requirements of the country.'

*Cripps*: 'There is the other point that the treaties were made by the British Crown and therefore except with their consent the obligations could not be transferred by the Crown to any other authority.'

*Ayyangar*: 'You have effected these transfers twice in recent history. On the first occasion the Rulers of States were not even consulted. That was in 1858 when the Crown took over the relations with Indian States from the East India Company and administered those relations through the Governor-General in Council, that is the Government of India. In 1935 this arrangement gave place to a new one under which the Crown withdrew the powers from the Governor-General in Council and vested them in a Crown Representative. Under independent India both the Governor-General in Council and the Crown Representative will presumably disappear. Their places will have to be taken by the new Government of what is now British India. If the transfer of paramountcy to this new Government could be effected with the consent of Indian States and on terms which perhaps might be made more acceptable to them than those on which paramountcy is exercised today by the Crown Representative, it will all be to the good, but if all or some of the States should hesitate as regards this transfer it has to be made in spite of such hesitation, for otherwise not merely the defence and foreign policy of India, but even the efficient internal administration of common economic and other matters will become almost impossible.'

Cripps had nothing further to say on the subject of Indian States.

*Ayyangar*: 'There is one point I would like to draw your attention to. The enormous proportions to which communal tension has reached in the country are directly traceable to separate electorates. You cannot have healthy political life in any country where the electorates which should exercise the sovereign controlling power are based upon religion, race, creed or caste. If in connexion with the negotiations you are now engaged in it is possible as part of the agreement which you propose to see arrived at between the parties

to put pressure on them for substituting joint electorates for separate electorates it will be a service of incalculable value to the future political development of India.'

*Cripps*: 'I am all in favour of joint electorates. But don't you think that we should rather not touch that question but leave it to the Interim Government and the constitution-making body?'

*Ayyangar*: 'The immediate matter for settlement no doubt is the issue of Pakistan, the formation of an Interim Government and the convening of a constitution-making body. But I thought it would be helpful to the Interim Government and the constitution-making body if, while pressure is being applied on both parties for a settlement on the major issue of Pakistan, this important problem of electorates is also tackled and that even if a final decision is not arrived at on it now the way could be paved for a fairly satisfactory solution at the proper time. Let me add that separate electorates are unhealthy not only to the Government of a united India; in fact if Mr. Jinnah has his way about Pakistan separate electorates will prove a greater headache to Pakistan than to Hindustan. The Muslim minority in the Hindustan of Jinnah's conception will be twenty million against a Hindu population in the same area of about 150 millions. On the other hand the non-Muslim minority in Pakistan will be forty-four millions against a Muslim population therein of about seventy millions.'

*Cripps*: 'Oh. That is Jinnah's Pakistan!!! It is an impossible idea. To think of setting up a new State of Pakistan with so heavy a Hindu minority of forty-four millions which will be in opposition to the Government of Pakistan! It is inconceivable. I think you will agree that it is better that this question of electorates is left over for decision by the constitution-making body.'

A man of prodigious memory, Sir Gopalaswami Ayyangar recorded this conversation himself and handed to Gandhiji a copy of the record; he won Gandhiji's approbation for putting forward the Congress point of view so skilfully. This was the able administrator's stepping-stone to the heart of Mr. Nehru and ultimately to a Cabinet Ministership and the special position of Nehru's confidant.

On the day this conversation took place Gandhiji's close friend, Mr. G. D. Birla, the eminent industrialist, entertained the three Cabinet Ministers to lunch at his house. In the course

of the friendly informal conversation over lunch Mr. Birla said: 'Everybody here is convinced that this time you are determined to quit India. But nobody is so sure about the Viceroy and the "steel frame" of British bureaucrats here. What will you do if the Viceroy does not co-operate?' 'In that case we shall take him home with us,' said Sir Stafford almost gaily. Such were his high hopes of success!

The Cabinet Mission held their marathon interviews from the 1st to the 17th April and gave the leaders of the Congress Party and the Muslim League the broad ideas of what they intended to do with regard to the transfer of power; they then went off to Kashmir for a week's holiday from 17th to 24th April to give the leaders of the political parties time to mull it over.

Mr. Pyarelal, Gandhiji's principal secretary, has recorded in his book *The Last Phase*:

'On the afternoon of the 28th April, while the Congress Working Committee was still engaged in examining the Cabinet Delegation's proposal, Gandhiji received a message from the Cabinet Delegation that Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps would like to meet him urgently either at Bhangi Colony or in the gardens in the Viceroy's House. They preferred the latter as they wanted the meeting to be private and if they came to Bhangi Colony it would attract publicity. Gandhiji went to see them at dusk. As they sat talking by the circular pool in the Viceroy's garden, Gandhiji discovered that all was not well in the Congress ranks. The Cabinet Delegation, it seems, had received a letter from one of Gandhiji's Congress colleagues about which neither Gandhiji nor the Working Committee had any knowledge. He was shocked.'

It so happened that the messenger who brought the message from the two British statesmen was myself. In fact I had strongly urged the two Ministers that they must meet Gandhiji privately and clear up the serious misunderstanding that had arisen between Gandhiji and them due to no fault of theirs. Mr. Pyarelal does not say in his book that the letter which had shocked Gandhiji was written by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to the Cabinet Delegation without the knowledge of his colleagues.

In his book *India Wins Freedom* Maulana Azad himself, in the

course of his own account of his negotiations, as Congress President, with the Cabinet Mission says (p. 139) about the communal problem of India: 'As a community the Muslims were extremely anxious about their future. It is true that they were in a clear majority in certain provinces. At the provincial level they had therefore no fears in these areas. They were however a minority in India as a whole and were troubled by the fear that their position and status in independent India would not be secure.' This was exactly the honest feeling of the British Cabinet Ministers and thus the Maulana and the Mission were in great sympathy with each other in their whole approach to the communal tangle in India and the prescription of a remedy for it. The Maulana's solution of the communal problems was the maximum decentralization of power in a federal structure, with the provinces enjoying the largest degree of autonomy in all subjects, leaving the Centre only with Defence, Communications and Foreign Affairs. Indeed the Maulana himself points out in his book with some emphasis the similarity between his ideas on the solution of the problem and the ideas of the Cabinet Mission. The Mission thus found in the Maulana an ally in their arduous task. It was perfectly understandable and the Maulana's motives must have been entirely good. But, as it turned out, he overstepped his limits in his anxiety to go down in history as the man of destiny who, as President of the Indian National Congress, pulled off a settlement of the communal problem and thus made it possible for the British Labour Government to transfer power, which they were genuinely anxious to do.

In the Congress Camp Maulana's No. 1 friend was Pandit Nehru, an emotional man of great human qualities, and his No. 1 critic was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a man of iron will and the shrewdest kind of practical sense. The Sardar was sceptical about the Maulana's highmindedness as a Muslim divine and he never shared Gandhiji's unflinching faith in the Maulana's integrity. In spite of all his high regard for the Maulana Gandhiji saw in his ideas, which were similar to the scheme based upon certain 'fundamental principles' which the Mission formulated after their return from Kashmir on the 24th

April, what he called 'the seeds of Pakistan'. Gandhiji was uneasy when the Mission proposed that the representatives of the Congress and the Muslim League should move from Delhi to Simla on 1st May in order to meet each other under the auspices of the Mission to discuss the scheme based on these 'fundamental principles'. The Mission tried to satisfy Gandhiji by explaining to him that by the acceptance of the invitation to go to Simla to meet under the auspices of the Mission the negotiating team of either party committed themselves to nothing. But Gandhiji was not satisfied. He virtually refused to go to Simla. The Cabinet Mission was very anxious to persuade Gandhiji to be in Simla. But Gandhiji had an uncanny feeling, which he did not understand, that there was something wrong somewhere, and in such a situation his inner being became paralysed and his only desire was to keep out of it all. It was a Monday, his day of silence, when he summoned me to talk to me about his mental agony. As he was silent he wrote a note on a piece of paper which I have preserved all these years (see Plate 8). Translated into English it means:

'Tell Cripps that my Party will be large. All of us cannot stay at Manorville [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's house] I do not want to go anywhere. If a place can be found in Simla where we could comfortably stay, then I would be willing to go. In my heart I feel that I do not want to go. If they leave me out that would be better. Talk all this over with Blaker [Private Secretary to Cripps].

'There is a moral aspect, too. They are saying one thing to the world and another thing to me. Why get me mixed up with all this? I have faith in you. I believe that your faith in God is living faith. If you want to ask me anything further about it, then ask me.'

It was heart-breaking to see the expression of pain on his face. I went to Cripps and told him how unhappy Gandhiji was and how reluctant he was to go to Simla to be a party to these negotiations. Cripps was moved by the report I gave him and talked to me at some length trying to divine the cause of Gandhiji's mental distress. He said he did not understand why Gandhiji should be so upset about the principles on which they were trying to bring about a compromise between the Congress Party and the Muslim League. For, after all, they had quite a



clear understanding with the President of his own Party, Maulana Azad, about this matter and, in fact, they had a letter in writing from the Maulana to indicate that he was confident of carrying the Congress with him—in spite of whatever internal differences there were inside the Congress. I went back to Gandhiji and told him about the letter and he was shocked. 'Are you quite sure you have not misheard or misunderstood Cripps?' he inquired. I assured him that there was no mistake about it. Horace Alexander who was with me remarked: 'Well, the effect on him was devastating. But you had to tell him. There was no escape from it.' Gandhiji could not sleep that night. In the morning he told me to go to Cripps and ask him if he would be prepared to show the letter to Gandhiji. Cripps explained that it was a confidential letter addressed by the Maulana and the Mission had taken it for granted that the Maulana must have mentioned it to his colleagues, but since Gandhiji was unaware of it and wished to see it he thought it was best to let Gandhiji see it. He asked George Blaker, his private secretary, to hand over the letter to me.

Sitting on the floor of his little room in the Bhangi Colony, Gandhiji read the letter and as he put it down on the little desk in front of him it was announced that Maulana Saheb had arrived and all the three of us there—Rajkumari, Pyarelalji and I promptly left the room, because Maulana Saheb always wished to be left alone whenever he came to see Gandhiji. There was a wooden partition in the room and Rajkumari and Pyarelalji used to sit behind the wooden partition and do their work; they were permitted to listen to any conversation they liked. They both heard Gandhiji ask Maulana Saheb a straight question whether he had written any letter to the Viceroy about the negotiations that were going on. The Maulana flatly denied having written any letter at all. He did this while the letter in original was lying in front of Gandhiji on his little writing desk at a distance of two or three yards from the spot where Maulana Saheb was sitting. After the meeting with the Maulana Gandhiji handed the letter back to me and asked me to return it to Cripps. Rajkumari kept a copy of the letter but Gandhiji made her destroy the copy; he did not want

any copy of the letter to be kept. It was a brief letter. As far as I can remember there was nothing particularly objectionable in the letter; the Maulana had said that there was no need for the Cabinet Mission to worry too much about Gandhiji or his misgivings about the Mission's proposals. If the Maulana was confident that he could see the proposals through he was entitled to say so. Perhaps the Maulana's justification was that he was doing it in the best interest of the country. But what deeply upset Gandhiji was that a life-long colleague to whom he had such unflinching loyalty could be so untruthful.

Unhappiness pervaded the whole atmosphere. Gandhiji talked to Sardar Vallabhbhai and one other colleague about his unhappiness and the story of the Maulana's letter spread amongst the members of Gandhiji's inner circle. Panditji was wild with anger when he heard the story. He was not angry with his friend, the Maulana; he was angry with me! To him my action amounted to mischief-making. Later Sardar Vallabhbhai told me that Panditji had quite a few hard things to say about me in the Working Committee meeting in the presence of Gandhiji and about the peculiar character of my association with the momentous negotiations that were going on to decide the fate of a great nation; as Gandhiji's young man I did not have even a well-defined position as one of his private secretaries; and yet I was seeing the British Cabinet Ministers on his behalf not only every day but many times a day and even at odd hours at night. And had these British Ministers known me from Adam that they thought fit to trust me with their secrets? In his view this was an extraordinary state of affairs and he did not like it. Sardar Vallabhbhai said to me as soon as he came out of the Working Committee meeting. 'Your great Panditji is suspicious. He imagines there is something fishy about the role you are playing in all this. I am disgusted.' 'What did Bapu say?' I inquired anxiously. 'He said only one sentence,' said Vallabhbhai. 'He listened very patiently to all this nonsense and quietly remarked: "*Usko mai nehi chhor sakta* (I cannot part company with him)." That silenced him.' Thus started my love-hate relationship with Panditji. I never recovered from it until after the Chinese invaded India in 1962.

Later in the day I went back to Cripps and told him that if he wanted to save his relationship with Gandhiji the only thing to do in such a situation was for him to go to Gandhiji and make a clean confession. He agreed with me that in the circumstances that was the only right thing to do. 'But I will go to Maulana first', he added, 'and give him a chance to make his own confession first; but if he does not respond then I will go to the old man and make ample amends.' Cripps did go to the Maulana and did suggest that he should go to Gandhiji and talk to him frankly about it. Maulana refused. So Cripps went to Gandhiji and made his own confession. The gentle Lord Pethick-Lawrence was deeply distressed to hear about all this. He sent for me and told me that he would like to talk privately to Gandhiji. He said he would be quite willing to come to the Bhangi Colony along with Cripps to see Gandhiji but the Secretary of State's visit to the Bhangi Colony might let loose all kinds of rumours and speculations: so could I bring Gandhiji that evening for a walk with the two of them in the garden at the back of the Viceroy's House? They could easily walk over from No. 2 Willingdon Crescent without being seen by anybody because this house was inside the Viceregal Estate. Gandhiji agreed and after the prayers that evening, the 28th of April, we drove down to the back entrance of the Mughal gardens. Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps met Gandhiji at the entrance and as they talked and walked round and round the circular sunken garden I sat on the bank and sadly watched this mournful procession of three unhappy men.

The two Englishmen, in the course of this walk and talk, persuaded Gandhiji to agree to go to Simla and make himself available, in spite of his misgivings, to them and to the Congress Party leaders for consultation. Next morning Gandhiji wrote to Cripps to say:

*New Delhi*  
*29th April 1946*

Dear Sir Stafford,

You do not understand how uneasy I feel. Something is wrong. But I shall come to Simla. I cannot take my necessarily

big family to Rajkumari's house. I have to fall back upon the Government for quarters for about 15 people. Hardly any service will be wanted. But utensils and foodstuffs will be necessary. Goat's milk and train accommodation and the lift from Kalka. All this is strange for me but it has become true.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Sir Stafford Cripps*

The Government of course went out of its way to make all arrangements for Gandhiji and his party. They placed at his disposal a big house called 'Chadwick' on Summer Hill, not far from Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's house 'Manorville'. A special train took us all from Delhi to Kalka and from there to Simla. Gandhiji specially invited Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and his daughter and nurse, Maniben, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan as well as his two Quaker friends, Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander to stay with him. The house, 'Chadwick' was the residence of the Governor of Burma during the war when the Japanese had occupied Burma and the Burma Government had moved to India; it had extensive grounds, which were very suitable for Gandhiji's prayer meetings. But upon his arrival in Simla he was again seized with a strange sense of uneasiness. 'A crisis within a crisis' he called it. He suddenly decided that in that hour of crisis of the soul he was going to depend on God alone and on no human help. He decided to deny himself the services even of those faithful men and women, the members of his entourage, who used to look after his simple food and his few clothes, sleeping arrangements, his letters and secretarial work and the little attention that his frail body needed in his old age. So the entire party packed up to leave Simla the next day, and when I saw that even the faithful Pyarelal ('faithful as a dog', he used to say) was getting ready to go, I went up to Gandhiji and said: 'Bapu, Pyarelalbhai is going. I think I, too, ought to go.' 'No you are not to go,' said Gandhiji. 'I shall need you. You trust these three Englishmen more than I do. I may be unjust to them in my judgment.

But you are not likely to be unjust to them. That is why I shall need you in my dealings with them.'

So I stayed. And there stayed with him his two Quaker friends, Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander, as well as Sardar Vallabhbhai and Badshah Khan.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Salt and Political Prisoners*

**W**HILE ALL the political leaders were deeply absorbed in the hectic negotiations to decide the future of India, Gandhiji did some other business with the British Cabinet Ministers, on the side, so to speak. He had not forgotten the political prisoners who were languishing in prison for the sake of the independence of India that was about to be ushered in; and the right of the poor to make salt for their own use without paying taxes, for which he fought for so many years, was not off his brain. Soon after his arrival in Delhi for negotiations with the Cabinet Mission he gave me two commissions: I was to persuade the Secretary of State to release the political prisoners, the Viceroy notwithstanding; I was to persuade the Viceroy to do something seriously about the abolition of the salt tax as a gesture to the people of India of the good days that were coming.

About the political prisoners in Bengal, Gandhiji fought earlier, in December and January, with Governor Casey, who arranged for him to visit the prisoners in all the jails in and around Calcutta. He got Mr. Casey to release forty-one of the principal security prisoners in January and fifty-one in February. But I was given the job of pestering Mr. Casey's successor, Sir Frederick Burrows, until all the security prisoners of Bengal were released. In the first week of March Gandhiji summoned me to Poona where he was trying to regain his health in the Nature Cure Clinic of Dr. Dinshaw Mehta and talked to me about his concern for the Bengal *détenus*. He wrote a letter to the new Governor of Bengal, whom he had not met; and asked me to take it to the Governor to see what I could do with him:

*Nature Cure Clinic  
6, Todiwala Road, Poona  
10th March, 1946*

Dear Friend,

Your predecessor Mr. Casey left for you a legacy and told me that you would have to deal yourself with the remaining political prisoners or *détenus* of Bengal.

I have no desire to worry you in the beginning stage of your career but the letter I have just received from important prisoners or *détenus* in Dum Dum Jail encourages me to do so. The letter speaks for itself. I simply say by way of comment that it is a tragedy or, may I say, even a disgrace to keep these people in jail without trial, even on suspicion however strong that may be. I plead for courageous wholesale release.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. Sir Frederick Burrows,  
Governor of Bengal,  
Calcutta*

Gandhiji enclosed the letter he had received from the leading political prisoners who were then lodged in the Dum Dum Central Jail. The letter was signed by Mr. Arun Chandra Guha and Mr. Bhupen Datta, who made it plain on behalf of their colleagues that they accepted the practical value of Gandhiji's non-violence; they abjured terrorist violence and had no intention of making any effort to organize a violent movement. The letter, which strengthened Gandhiji's hand in demanding their release, said:

*Dum Dum Central Jail  
17th January, 1946*

Mahatmaji,

Since your release, we have been urging on you to come to Bengal. Today Bengal needs your tender care. At last, as soon as the opportunity has offered itself, you have come to Bengal and we hope Bengal has given you her best reception. We regret we could not physically take part in that reception.

We offer you our allegiance—to you personally for your ideal

and methods and to you as the leader of the nation. The last 3 or 4 years have been years of trials, tribulations and sufferings for the nation; you personally had your bereavements also. The nation has felt with you the national sufferings and humiliations as also your bereavements.

Now to our personal matters. When the Congress was faced with a crisis, we took charge of the Congress amidst wide-spread and deep opposition. With our limited resources, and in the short period available, we could just save the structure of the Congress organization but could not achieve much in terms of definite work. About a year before that, by a public declaration we had liquidated the Jugantur Party and joined the Congress without any party reservation. But as regards the details of the Congress methods and programme we were yet labouring under some doubts. When we were faced with the alternative either to take the official responsibility of the Congress or to see Bengal cutting adrift from the All-India Congress, we faltered for a while. We discussed our difficulties with the Maulana Saheb. We gave him in writing where and how far we then differed from the accepted policy of the Congress. We sent copies of that statement to you and to the members of the Working Committee. Our statement was discussed in the Working Committee after which Maulana Saheb asked us to accept official responsibility.

We started working honestly and sincerely; and our doubts and differences melted away particularly in view of the ever-developing policy of the Congress during the war. But we were arrested in May 1941. Then the threat of Japanese invasion, the programme of self-sufficiency and self-protection, the August movement, the famine—the aftermath of the war—all these have brought us close to you, have made us deeply appreciate your programme. Just after our arrest we had some correspondence with you. You then wrote—‘I have no difficulty in accepting your limitations of non-violence. If worked honestly it will automatically expand.’ Now we can say we have no difficulty in accepting your non-violence—not only as the best means for achieving Indian revolution, but also for saving the common man of the world as against the rising world Fascism



based on naked violence. Your gospel of non-violence and constructive work (which primarily means service to the rural population and to the down-trodden) is the only way to save the common man from slavery and misery.

We have come over to you traversing through Marx—who was certainly a landmark in human history. But history has not been standing where he elaborated his programme of action for particular regions. You may not like it, but we see in you the natural culmination of Marx—if we take him as the inspirer of an outlook, as the propounder of a method for analysing history and deciding on a course of action, and not merely as the giver of a set of rigid dogmas for all time and for all climes.

We have been working in and with the Congress since 1921—of course retaining a second love sometimes dormant and sometimes dominant. In 1938 we outgrew that and made the Congress our only vehicle for serving the cause of Indian independence. Now we believe your method and programme is the only right way to be followed. We further believe that the Congress should be made into a monolithic organization with undivided and indivisible allegiance. We feel, unless this can be done, it is difficult to do real Congress work at least in Bengal, where there are scores of parties.

Bengal has done some pioneering work in the field of national awakening. The young men of Bengal have had a sneaking pride for that past service. Even when that has gone out of date, our workers have clung to that. That was our handicap. But we felt a new atmosphere had come after the glorious August upheaval and the terrible famine. We were gladly awaiting a congenial atmosphere for real Congress work. The pronouncements of prominent Congress leaders after their release also encouraged us in that hope. But suddenly a diversion was created giving a fresh fillip to romantic politics. Facts were overlooked, teachings of history were ignored, admitted failures were covered up. Even top leaders were swayed off their feet to make unexpected utterances. Perhaps you have cautioned them. Anyhow, in all probability, during your recent sojourn you have noticed that atmosphere today is much clearer.

Particularly after the ravages of the famine, it is extremely favourable for working the constructive programme. We hope the moment of the psychological break-away from the past would not be allowed to slip away and under your inspiration and insistence every effort would be directed to organizing the masses on the basis of your 18 point programme.

Our next problem is Communal. Here also much harm has been done by diluting your stand. This we note with deep sorrow. We believe the best way to prevent Pakistan is to concede autonomy and to prepare the masses for it through service. Much harm was done in Bengal in 1934-37 by an unseemly wrangle over the Communal Award. We hope the same mistake may not be repeated on an all India scale now.

After our release, we shall be working with the outlook stated above. We shall try to stay with you for some time before we start work here. In our future work we shall seek your guidance and help. We hope now Bengal will appreciate and accept the ever-evolving Gandhi, evolving on the fundamental basis of his love for the common man.

Before concluding, we must say a few words regarding our detention. The Government plea of terrorism is wholly false. Even before our arrest, Sir Nazimuddin, then Home Minister, personally told us his police reports and confirmed his personal information that we were doing nothing but Congress work. This was barely two months before our arrest. In 1943, as Premier, he made almost the same statement in the Assembly. This bogey of terrorism is simply a police trick—to serve a double purpose: to misrepresent us to the public and thus to create difficulties for our work, and secondly to give a broad hint that terrorist groups are still active so that guileless and sincere young men may be duped and an atmosphere of terrorism kept up to serve imperialist purposes as against the Congress programme. This is because that programme cuts at the very root of the full-fledged Fascist structure that is coming into being through the United Nations' plannings as well as Indian Government's. There has been no case of terrorism in Bengal since 1934 and it is simply insulting our intelligence as well as our patriotism to say that we are thinking—or for that

matter any other political group is thinking—of terrorism at this hour of the day.

Yours sincerely,

ARUN CHANDRA GUHA

BHUPENDRA KUMAR DATTA

AND FRIENDS

Before leaving Calcutta Governor Casey had introduced me to his successor, Sir Frederick Burrows, who as a person was the antithesis of Casey. Casey was an international statesman, a former Cabinet Minister, an extraordinarily sophisticated political leader, with a very British education at Cambridge, and one of the richest men in Australia. Fred Burrows was in earlier life an engine driver who rose to be Chairman of the National Union of Railwaymen in Britain. The Attlee Government, which had a very large Trade Union element in it, distributed various important jobs to those who had made their mark as Union officials; Fred Burrows was made a Knight and sent to Bengal as its last British Governor. Fred was a very genuine man of great modesty, who was a little dazzled by the brilliance of his eminent predecessor. I was touched by his frank remark when we first met that he would like me to have the same relationship with him as I had with Casey. He tried very hard to please me and, through me, Gandhiji. A few days after the receipt of the Gandhi letter he wrote back to say:

*Government House, Calcutta  
16th March, 1946.*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

This is just a short note to convey to you my respects and sincere good wishes. I have this morning had an interview with Sudhir Ghosh and I have explained to him in some detail the answers to some of the points raised by you in your letters to Mr. Casey arising out of your discussion.

I will write you shortly giving the up-to-date position in respect of the security prisoners, in answer to your letter to me.

Sudhir will give you the position up to the end of March.

Yours very sincerely,

F. BURROWS

Three days later Governor Burrows wrote a second letter to report progress to Gandhiji:

*Government House  
Calcutta  
19th March, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

I have explained verbally to Sudhir Ghosh, who saw me on Saturday, how the other matters are proceeding which you raised in your discussions with Mr. Casey, but as I feel that your chief interest lies in the matter which forms the subject of your letter to me of the 10th March I am writing to you about that.

In the matter of the *détenus*, to which your letter refers, I am pursuing the policy of my predecessor though I think I may fairly claim to have speeded things up, especially when account is taken of the fact that the persons still detained are those who have been regarded as the most dangerous. In the first fortnight of March, 61 *détenus* were released and the number still held in detention on the 15th March was 115; this figure will be substantially reduced by the end of the month.

Yours sincerely,

F. BURROWS

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.,  
Nature Cure Clinic,  
6, Todiwala Road,  
Poona*

Gandhiji was pleased with the response of this unsophisticated engine driver turned Governor and wrote back to say how delighted he was with the progress in the release of political *détenus*:

*Nature Cure Clinic  
6, Todiwala Road, Poona  
22nd March 1946*

Dear Friend,

I was delighted to receive your letter through Shri Sudhir Ghosh. He takes this letter to you and he will tell you all my

thoughts about prisoners, salt, employees of Electric Corporation and Khadi.

With my regards to you and Lady Burrows,  
Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Governor of Bengal,  
Calcutta*

Gandhiji followed up, with Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps in Delhi, the question of the release of the rest of the political prisoners in other parts of India, in particular his two favourite disciples, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. I was instructed to go to the Secretary of State and use whatever powers of persuasion I possessed. Gandhiji jokingly told me that I would be given a prize if I succeeded. In fact I found the assignment a fairly easy one. It was no problem to persuade the gentle Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps to see the good sense of creating an atmosphere of goodwill, after years of recrimination, in order to achieve the purpose of the very mission which had brought them to New Delhi. The Secretary of State's problem, of course, was to carry the Viceroy with him. At the end of the long talk he said: 'You do one thing. Get Gandhiji to write to me and get him to put down in the letter the substance of what you have told me. I will then take it up with the Viceroy.' Post-haste I went back to Gandhiji and made him write this letter:

*Valmiki Mandir  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
2nd April, 1946*

Dear Lord Lawrence,

Our mutual friend Sudhir Ghosh tells me that you would like me to reduce to writing the points I told him to discuss informally with you and Sir Stafford.

One is universal among all independence-minded people as distinguished from the dumb millions, whether Congressmen or other. It is the immediate release of political prisoners irrespective of the charge of violence or non-violence. They

cannot be a danger to the State now that the necessity for independence has become common cause. It seems to be ridiculous to keep, say, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan and Dr. Lohia, both learned and cultured men of whom any society would be proud, nor is there any occasion for treating any person as an underground worker. To leave the question of discharge for disposal by the incoming national Government would be a step no one will understand or appreciate. Independence will lose its grace.

The other affects the masses, I refer to the salt tax. As a means of raising revenue, it is insignificant. As a means of harassing the masses, it is a measure of which the mischief is indescribable. The masses will hardly appreciate independence if the burden of the salt monopoly continues to afflict them. I must not weary you with argument. I mention the two measures as a preparation of the Indian mind for independence. They will produce a psychological effect.

I may mention that I discussed both the measures in a different setting with Mr. Casey and I am now in correspondence with the present Governor of Bengal. I may add that I have today heard from Mr. Abell in regard to the salt tax that 'the Government do not find themselves able to accept the suggestion'.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*The Rt. Hon'ble Lord Pethick-Lawrence,  
Secretary of State for India,  
New Delhi*

Within a week Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan came out of the Agra prison and presented himself to Gandhiji at the Bhangi Colony in New Delhi. I reminded Gandhiji about the prize but forgot to collect it. The Secretary of State not only secured the release of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan but asked Sir Stafford Cripps, a like-minded socialist, to get together with Mr. Narayan, and seek his friendly advice on the negotiations that were going on. This Sir Stafford did on 15th April, as he said in a letter to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur:

*Office of Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
Sunday, 14th April, 1946*

My dear Rajkumari,

I was sorry not to see you at the Quaker meeting this morning as I had looked forward to a chat with you after it.

I fully appreciate Mr. Gandhi's anxiety about the matters he has mentioned and we are doing our best about them, but we can only do them through the administration and that is not always quick and easy. I am hoping to see Narayan tomorrow. I tried to arrange it for today but he could not manage the time as he had another meeting fixed already.

I will get on to Sudhir as soon as George Blaker is back and I know my commitments.

Again many thanks for meeting and I do hope we may meet soon again to compare notes.

Yours very sincerely,

R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

After securing the release of the political prisoners Gandhiji concentrated on salt. But this proved to be much less easy, because the Viceroy and, in particular George Abell, the Viceroy's Private Secretary, were adamant about it; the Secretary of State did not see why Gandhiji attached such great importance to what appeared to him to be a minor matter; in any case it was a matter, in the Secretary of State's view, which could easily wait for a few months and be handled by Gandhiji's own disciples in the new Indian Government. The Secretary of State, therefore, was not interested in getting himself involved in it. I was, in the circumstances, instructed to pester the Viceroy and see if I could make any headway with him.

But before going to the Viceroy I thought it would be wiser to enlist, if possible, the sympathy and support of the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council who was directly responsible for the salt tax. Sir Archibald Rowlands, the Finance Member, whose background was that of a British

civil servant in Whitehall, was reported to be an exceptionally able man. I had met him socially a few times and liked his friendliness but I never discussed any official business with him. I decided to talk this matter over with him to see his reaction to Gandhiji's proposal of immediate abolition of the salt tax as a gesture from the British to India on the eve of Independence. I found this distinguished British bureaucrat unexpectedly responsive. I handed to him a note which started with a quotation from Ramsay Macdonald:

'The salt tax is an exaction and oppression and, if the people understood it, it would only breed discontent. It is a survival of the general exploitation of India's poverty by a profit-making Company.'

Sir Archibald Rowlands immediately saw the meaning of it. He was impressed with the points that emerged from the note given to him, viz: that whereas the cost of production of salt at the Government Salt Sources (1944-5) was Rs. 0/4/4 per maund, the wholesale price per maund in Delhi was Rs. 3/8/4; deducting from it Rs. 1/9/- in excise duty, the balance of Rs. 1/11/- over the cost of production represented the overhead charges, i.e. nearly 623 per cent on the cost; the corresponding percentage for the Calcutta area was 1,592 per cent. And why this discrepancy between the Calcutta price and the Delhi price of salt? Was it not because the bulk of Liverpool salt was landed in Calcutta and was consumed entirely in Bengal and the port's hinterland? Why should 130 million of the people be taxed to subsidize this unnatural import? Such was the monstrosity of the Government's salt monopoly. If the people of Bengal were free to manufacture salt without any duty or licence, they could make all the salt they required at 1 or 2 annas per maund. Thus the argument ran in the note I handed to the Finance Member; Sir Archibald Rowlands pondered over this matter and told me that quite frankly he had never applied his mind to this question of the salt tax and he found himself in sympathy with Gandhiji's arguments and would be prepared to meet Gandhiji personally and discuss this whole matter with him. The same evening, the 5th of April, I took Sir Archibald to Gandhiji in the Bhangi



Colony. He was in his dinner clothes, all ready to go to dinner somewhere in New Delhi, and sat somewhat uncomfortably in a chair while Gandhiji sat, as usual, on the floor. He listened very attentively to all that Gandhiji had to say on the monstrous salt tax which he had fought for decades. He was so deeply absorbed in this discussion with Gandhiji that he almost missed his dinner! As he got up to go the Finance Member said that if he had met Gandhiji three months earlier the salt tax would have been excluded from the current year's budget. Gandhiji was deeply impressed with this Welshman. After Sir Archibald left Gandhiji remarked that he thought that this was the second ablest Briton he had met in India. I asked Gandhiji who the first one was and he promptly replied: 'Malcolm Hailey'.

I did not realize at that time that I was unwittingly getting Sir Archibald Rowlands into trouble with the Viceroy and the coterie of Indian Civil Service men who then ruled India.

The morning after his talk with Gandhiji Sir Archibald called me to his office and dictated in my presence a letter directing the Member, Central Board of Revenue, to proceed at once to prepare a scheme which would lead to the abolition of the salt tax. He had made up his mind to abolish the salt tax. He handed to me a copy of the letter which said:

*Finance Member of Council  
New Delhi  
April 6, 1946*

My dear Bingo,

I should be grateful if you would, in consultation with the Salt Revenue Commissioners, proceed at once to work out a scheme which will lead to the abolition of the Salt Tax. Obviously, I should like to know what arrangements exist in respect of the manufacture and sale of salt with private traders, States and Provinces.

I myself believe that if we can ourselves cut out the middle-man, we shall be able to sell salt at a price which will not result in much loss of revenue, even if the salt tax were abolished. I

recognize that a scheme along these lines may involve us in considerable capital expenditure in the way of storage, but capital expenditure presents no difficulty. If you would like to discuss the matter with me before proceeding, I should be very glad to do so.

Yours ever,

ARCHIE ROWLANDS

*H. Greenfield, Esq., C.I.E.,  
Member, Central Board of Revenue*

Gandhiji was delighted to see the bold and immediate action taken by this British Civil Servant. But he did not realize that Archie Rowlands had initiated this action without the knowledge of the Viceroy. In his enthusiasm Gandhiji shot off a letter to the Viceroy on the subject of the Salt Tax, imagining that he was strengthening the hands of the Finance Member. I trotted off to see His Excellency with this letter in my hand:

*Valmiki Mandir  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
6th April 1946*

Dear Friend,

I write this about two things that I discussed before the Cabinet Delegation on the 3rd instant.

Sir Archibald Rowlands was with me last night in order to have a talk with me about the salt tax. At the conclusion of our talk he was frank enough to tell me that had he met me three months ago the tax would have been abolished. I omit the rest of our important conversation in order to make my letter as brief as possible. Regard being had to the admission I sent to Sir Archibald Rowlands, Shri Sudhir Ghosh, whom he knows well to have further talks with him. He now contemplates abolition within three months or so. I know that nothing can be done by a single official, however strong or able he may be, unless he is supported by his superiors. And so I invoke your assistance in this humanitarian work. But more even than that is the consideration that I put before the Cabinet

Delegation, viz., that independence should be ushered in with the greatest good grace which the poorest villager in the remotest village can at once realize. More of this you can glean from Sudhir Babu if you feel inclined and can spare the time. He is carrying this note.

About prisoners I will not say anything as I understand that their release is imminent.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Viceroy*

Interviewing the Viceroy was a very different proposition from running up to Lord Pethick-Lawrence or Sir Stafford Cripps and getting it off one's chest. Lord Wavell was the soul of courtesy but a man of very few words. He very politely stood up to receive me in the enormous study of the Viceroy's House and I sat down and waited for him to ask me something about the purpose of my visit. Since nothing fell from the Viceroy's lips I started telling him my story of how Gandhiji was deeply concerned about the abolition of the salt tax and how he would love to persuade His Excellency to take an interest in the matter. I talked for some minutes about the inequity of the salt tax and what a burden it was on the poor and then paused for a while in the hope that His Excellency would make some remark. But His Excellency kept absolutely silent. So I went on to develop my second point, in the midst of which he interrupted me to answer my first point. When I went on to my third point and warmed up to explain what a wonderful gesture it would be for His Majesty's Government to fulfil Mr. Gandhi's wishes by doing something which was so close to his heart (I thought I was talking very intelligently!) the Viceroy politely stood up, extended his hand for a warm handshake and said: 'Thank you very much for coming to see me. It was kind of you to explain to me Mr. Gandhi's point of view in this matter of salt tax. Goodbye.'

It was a rather disconcerting experience. I did not know whether I had succeeded or failed to make an impression on the Viceroy's mind. Feeling somewhat uneasy I went back to

Gandhiji to report the conversation I had with His Excellency, whereupon Gandhiji decided that he himself had better go and see the Viceroy and plead with him. He wrote to the Viceroy's Private Secretary to say:

*Valmiki Mandir,  
8th April, 1946*

Dear Mr. Abell,

I feel that I have not put across to H.E. my innermost thoughts on the matter covered by my letter of day before yesterday's date. I would love to see him if he can spare me a few minutes from his busy time. Will you please let me know if H.E. can and if yes when?

Yours sincerely,  
M. K. GANDHI

*G. E. B. Abell Esq.*

There was no response from the Viceroy who, evidently, was not prepared to talk any more about salt. The Viceroy was furious when he heard that Sir Archibald Rowlands had given Gandhiji to understand that he would, within three months, abolish the salt tax. The Viceroy at the instance of George Abell and his cohorts gave Archie Rowlands a real dressing down. Unwittingly Gandhiji and I had got the good man into real trouble!

But Gandhiji was not the man to give up his struggle for the abolition of the salt tax. So when we moved from Delhi to Simla in the first week of May he again took it up with the Viceroy in a letter in which he wrote:

*Chadwick  
Simla West  
3rd May 1946*

Dear Mr. Abell,

Salt is not off my brain. For the sake of English honour I say that there should not be a day's delay about the abolition of this monopoly.

It is to impress upon H.E. what the monopoly has meant I enclose herewith an additional note prepared by Shri Pyarelal.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*G. E. B. Abell, Esq.,  
Simla*

The Viceroy's private secretary replied to say:

*Viceroy's Camp, India  
Simla*

*6th May, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

Thank you for your letter of the 3rd May about the salt tax and for the note by Mr. Pyarelal.

H.E. has personally studied the problem since you first mentioned it to him, but is not in a position to anticipate the results of the enquiry which is taking place. He realizes how deeply interested you are in the matter, but feels that he must make a full examination of the consequences which would follow any abolition of the tax, and might bear heavily on any new Government.

Yours sincerely,

G. E. B. ABELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

It was followed, within four days, by another letter from the Viceroy himself in which he said:

*Viceroy's Camp, India  
(Simla)*

*10th May, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

The Finance Member reports to me that rumours about a possible reduction or abolition of the salt duty are almost certain to cause a salt famine in certain areas unless immediate steps are taken to prevent it. Merchants and wholesale dealers

are abstaining from placing orders with the salt manufacturers lest they be caught with large stocks on which they have paid duty, but which they may be able to sell only at a lower duty-free rate. Strong representations have been received from the Bombay salt merchants and Shilotries Association on the subject.

2. To prevent a salt famine, which would of course be a serious matter for the poor, Government propose to put out a Press Note of which I enclose a copy.

3. I am sure you will appreciate that we cannot avoid taking this action.

Yours sincerely,

WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

With the letter was enclosed the proposed Note to be issued to the Press:

'Complaints have been received by Government that rumours to the effect that the salt duty may be reduced or abolished have sown doubt and uncertainty in the mind of traders and manufacturers to such an extent as to discourage the purchase of salt, thereby hampering trade and slowing down manufacture and, in view of the present chronic transport difficulties and of the further difficulty of transporting this commodity during the wet months, entailing serious risk of a salt famine in upcountry areas. To obviate these risks, Government desires to make clear that any change would only be made after a full and comprehensive investigation which would necessarily take considerable time, and that ample notice would be given in order to permit the disposal of duty-paid stocks.'

This really upset Gandhiji very deeply. He wrote a very harsh letter to the Viceroy:

*Chadwick  
Simla West  
11th May 1946*

Dear Friend,

I thank you for your letter of 10th instant about salt.

This is a fine instance of how the irresponsible mind works. You were good enough to tell me last Monday, when I was

silent that the British did not care for credit. When my silence was broken, the Cabinet Mission had come and we plunged into high politics. The corollary to your dictum seems to be that the British would not mind the discredit of any action.

In my opinion the notice you have been good enough to send me is a discreditable affair. The only straight answer from my mind which thinks ever of the masses and is responsible and responsive to them, would be to abolish the hateful monopoly and tax especially in these days of famine. But according to you this simple act of justice must be left to be done by your successor, the independent Government of India, whenever it comes into being.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Viceroy*

I was concerned to see that the argument between Gandhiji and the Viceroy over the salt tax was coming to a head. As it was Gandhiji was going through an inner crisis due to the shock of the discovery that a life-long comrade like Maulana Azad could be so untruthful to him. He had sent away all the permanent members of his entourage—even those who looked after his food, his clothes and his personal needs, because he wanted 'to depend on God alone and on no man', as he said. There was nothing that Vallabhbhai or Badshah Khan or I could do to relieve his loneliness. He still held regularly his usual morning and evening prayers. But there was nobody to sing his favourite hymns and songs to him. Those who could sing had gone away. Poor Maniben, Vallabhbhai's daughter and nurse, and I tried our best to fill in the gap. But both of us were very poor singers!

On top of it all the Viceroy's stubbornness about the salt tax made Gandhiji write that harsh letter. The tone of it sounded ominous to me. I feared that in spite of his frail health he might go on a fast and take some such drastic step and that would cause an upheaval in the whole country. In my distress I ran up to Sir Stafford Cripps and told him that he had better do something about it. Couldn't he speak to the Viceroy

and give him some good advice? This he agreed to do and it seemed that the Viceroy had relented somewhat in the letter he wrote in response to Gandhiji's harsh communication. He said:

*Viceroy's Camp, India  
(Simla)*

*11th May, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

Thank you for your letter about the salt tax. If you would care to discuss this matter I should be very glad to talk to you about it. I wonder if you are free at 7 o'clock this evening.

Yours sincerely,

WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

Gandhiji promptly went to see the Viceroy that evening. As I waited in the room next door I prayed that God might help these two men to avoid a head-on collision. When Gandhiji came out he looked a little relieved. He dismissed the car and said he would like to walk back to Summer Hill from the Viceregal Lodge. So leaning on my shoulders he slowly walked through the whole length of the grounds of the Viceregal Estate and through the back-door of it to Summer Hill. The distance was about 2 miles but I was a little scared because he was so frail and walking up to Summer Hill, although it was not very steep, was going to do him no good. But he gaily insisted on walking. So walking up the hill very slowly we got to 'Chadwick'. In the meantime the car had gone back without him. The driver of the car told Vallabhbhai that Gandhiji was walking from the Viceregal Lodge to Summer Hill. This so agitated Vallabhbhai and Badshah Khan that they started walking towards the Viceregal Lodge, just as Gandhiji and I reached the entrance of 'Chadwick'. Vallabhbhai was furious with me. He took me to task for 'allowing' Gandhiji to walk all that distance and up the hill. As if the old man was under anybody's control!

But Gandhiji was somewhat cheerful. He had successfully



convinced the Viceroy of the wrongness of what he was about to do. The Viceroy wrote the next day to say:

*Viceroy's Camp, India  
(Simla)*

*12th May, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

As a result of my talk with you I have arranged that the communiqué about the salt tax should be held up. The Finance Member will inform the trade organizations who have complained, that there is no prospect of the salt tax being immediately abolished, and that they will receive reasonable warning of any such action. He hopes that this may ensure that adequate stocks of salt will still be available.

Yours sincerely,  
WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

Gandhiji wrote back to thank the Viceroy:

*Simla  
14th May, 1946*

Dear Friend,

I have to thank you for your letter of 12th instant and for withholding the notice about salt.

Yours sincerely,  
M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Viceroy*

He did not stop until the salt tax was actually abolished in October of that year by the Interim Government.



1. Mahatma Gandhi, 1946



2 (a). The author with Mahatma Gandhi coming out of the office of the British Cabinet Delegation (3rd April 1946)



2 (b). The author with Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Pethick-Lawrence after a conference (April 1946)



3. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 1946



4. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1959



5. Sri Aurobindo, saint and seer of Pondicherry



6. The author with Senator Fulbright and Senator Sparkman (at a lunch given in honour of the author by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 4th March 1963)



7. The author with Senator Hubert Humphrey and Dr. B. C. Roy in the Senator's office in the Capitol





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *To Trust or Not to Trust*

**T**HE CONFERENCE at Simla lasted seven days, from 5th to 12th May. The Cabinet Mission gathered together under their auspices two negotiating teams representing the Congress and the Muslim League. The Congress team consisted of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mr. Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan; the Muslim League team consisting of Mr. Jinnah, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Mr. Mohammed Ismail Khan and Mr. Abdur Rab Nishtar. The suggested points for discussion at a Conference on the 9th May, which were put forward by the Cabinet Mission for agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League were:

1. There shall be an All-India Union Government and Legislature dealing with Foreign Affairs, Defence, Communications, Fundamental Rights and having the necessary powers to obtain for itself the finances it requires for these subjects.
2. All the remaining powers shall vest in the provinces.
3. Groups of provinces may be formed and such Groups may determine the provincial subjects which they desire to take in common.
4. The Groups may set up their own Executives and Legislatures.
5. The Legislature of the Union shall be composed of equal proportions from the Muslim-majority provinces and from the Hindu-majority provinces whether or not these or any of them have formed themselves into Groups, together with representatives of the States.
6. The Government of the Union shall be constituted in the same proportion as the Legislature.
7. The constitutions of the Union and the Groups (if any) shall contain a provision whereby any province can by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly call for a reconsideration of the terms of the

constitution after an initial period of ten years and at ten yearly intervals thereafter.

For the purpose of such reconsideration a body shall be constituted on the same basis as the original Constituent Assembly and with the same provisions as to voting and shall have power to amend the constitution in any way decided upon.

8. The constitution-making machinery to arrive at a constitution on the above basis, shall be as follows:

A. Representatives shall be elected from each Provincial Assembly in proportion to the strength of the various parties in that Assembly on the basis of 1/10th of their numbers.

B. Representatives shall be invited from the States on the basis of their population in proportion to the representation from British India.

C. The Constituent Assembly so formed shall meet at the earliest date possible in New Delhi.

D. After its preliminary meeting at which the general order of business will be settled, it will divide into three sections, one section representing the Hindu-majority provinces, one section representing the Muslim-majority provinces and one representing the States.

E. The first two sections will then meet separately to decide the provincial constitutions for their Group and, if they wish, a Group constitution.

F. When these have been settled it will be open to any province to decide to opt out of its original Group and go into the other Group or to remain outside any Group.

G. Thereafter the three bodies will meet together to settle the constitution for the Union on the lines agreed in paragraphs 1-7 above.

H. No major point in the Union constitution which affects the communal issue shall be deemed to be passed by the Assembly unless a majority of both the two major communities vote in its favour.

Although Gandhiji was not a member of the Congress negotiating team the Cabinet Mission sent him in advance on 8th May a note containing the points for negotiation and agreement and asked for his reaction. On 8th May very late in the evening Gandhiji handed me a letter addressed to Sir Stafford Cripps and said that he would like it to reach Cripps

without delay. It was raining hard and a storm was raging outside. But I knew that a storm was also raging inside Gandhiji. So I dared not wait till the morning. I picked up my umbrella and plodded towards the Viceregal Lodge—a distance of two miles—in the rain and mud and cold wind of that dark Simla night. When I reached the Lodge gate the sentry stopped me and would not let me go in. I was drenched and the sentry was not at all impressed with my looks. I did not look at all like an Ambassador. I had an argument with the sentry but he insisted that he had no instruction to let me in.. It was past 9 o'clock. Fortunately one of the robin-red-breast *chaprassis* was going out of the Viceregal Lodge and heard me protesting to the sentry. He gave me a big salaam because he had seen me with the Mahatma so many times in the Viceroy's House in Delhi and Simla. He explained to the sentry with a flourish that the Babuji was no ordinary man; he was the emissary of the 'king of the poor' and could not be treated like that. The sentry looked doubtful but accompanied me up to the A.D.C.'s room of the great house and one of the A.D.C.'s rang up Sir Stafford Cripps to say that I had come without an appointment—the A.D.C. explained to me that Sir Stafford was already in bed but would like me to go up to his bedroom and talk to him there. Sir Stafford read the letter several times over. Gandhiji had written:

*Chadwick*  
*Simla West*  
*8th May 1946*

Dear Sir Stafford,

The four Congress delegates had a warm debate over the Cabinet Mission's suggestions. The foremost was that if the delegates accepted it, it was binding on them and its terms were binding on them and therefore on Congress unless the latter repudiated them. The same would be the case with the League. On the strength of what you told me last night I said they were binding on no one. The Constituent Assembly would be free to throw out any of the items and the members of the two delegations were equally free to add to or amend the

suggestions before the Constituent Assembly. I added that they were meant only as a scaffolding by means of which the two institutions could be brought to the Constituent Assembly adumbrated in the draft. If you are able to confirm the above and are free to make a public declaration to that effect, the main difficulty would be over.

As to merits, the difficulty about parity between six Hindu majority Provinces and the five Muslim majority Provinces is insurmountable. The Muslim majority provinces represent over nine crores of the population as against over 19 crores\* of the Hindu majority Provinces. This is really worse than Pakistan. What is suggested in its place is that the Central Legislature should be framed on the population basis and so too the executive. If this is considered unfair, an impartial non-British tribunal should award on this as many other matters of differences otherwise incapable of adjustment. If these two points are cleared my way would be clear.

Instead of running down to you, I thought I should send this note leaving you to decide whether we should meet before the conference or whether an exchange of letters should suffice. I am in your hands.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Sir Stafford Cripps*

Cripps was not at all well. He had had a breakdown. The previous evening he had paid Gandhiji a visit to 'Chadwick'; after his visit he asked me if I would not like to walk with him to the Viceregal Lodge, which I did. As we reached his room he suddenly collapsed on the floor. The pressures and tensions of these negotiations were too much even for his iron will. He was exhausted. Still he wanted to talk. So I sat there near his bed for quite a long time and listened to all he said. He talked about Isobel, his wife, and wondered if he should not arrange for her to come over from England; for all these burdens were proving to be a little too much for him to bear alone. He talked

\* A crore = ten millions.

about his son, John, and his four grandchildren and how happy his son was, aloof from politics, living in the country and editing the *Countryman*. He talked about the tragedy of distrust. He explained that there was nothing wrong with the suggestions for discussion. The real problem was the deep distrust between the Congress and the League. He looked sad as he talked. Next morning he wrote this letter to Gandhiji:

*Viceregal Lodge,  
Simla  
9th May, 1946*

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

Sudhir brought me your letter last night, just as I had got into bed after excellent treatment by Dr. Mehta. So I sent you back an answer verbally by him.

This is merely a note to confirm what he will have told you.

As to your first point, the position as I see it is this: If the Congress and Muslim League delegates agree to a certain basis for the new constitution they will be bound as honourable men to do their utmost to see that the form agreed upon is that adopted by the Constituent Assembly. To do less than that would be to go back upon their word.

As to the second point—equality at the Centre, I appreciate your difficulty though not that ‘it would be worse than Pakistan’. If this can be overcome by some form of international arbitration by agreement with the League there is of course nothing whatever to prevent such an agreement.

I am very grateful for this further helpful advice and look forward to seeing you again this evening after the conference has met again.

Yours very sincerely,  
R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

The Congress Party was firmly opposed to the creation of any legislative machinery for groups of provinces which, in their view, would create three different strata of executive and

legislative bodies which would be cumbersome and would lead to continuous friction between the different layers. They were also emphatically of the opinion that it was not open to the Conference to entertain any suggestion for a division of India; if this was to come it should come through the Constituent Assembly. Mr. Jinnah, too, insisted that from the point of view of the Muslim League, there were many objectionable features in the suggestions put forward by the Mission and that no useful purpose would be served by discussing them. The Congress Party also had strong objection to the proposal of parity in the Central Executive and legislature between the Hindu majority provinces with a population of 190 million, and Muslim majority provinces with a population of ninety million. Mr. Jinnah was not prepared to accept arbitration to settle the question of parity. Thus, in spite of the valiant effort of the Mission, the Conference at Simla failed and we mournfully returned to New Delhi on 13th May.

Upon our return to Delhi quite a few of us had a bout of illness of some sort or other. Sir Stafford Cripps was, of course, laid up and his collapse caused so much anxiety that the Secretary of State had to get Lady Cripps to come over from London to look after him. I had my share of illness too; I developed a peculiar swelling of the throat and I was taken to Dr. Joshi's Nursing Home in Karolbagh; Dr. Joshi was a famous surgeon but his hospital was a shabby and ramshackle place. While I was spending some days of feverish nightmare in that extraordinary hospital, I discovered one morning much excitement among the hospital staff who were telling each other that Mahatma Gandhi was going to visit the hospital and everything had to be clean and tidy. A little later the Mahatma himself appeared but poor Dr. Joshi was disappointed to hear that the Mahatma had come merely to see me and not the hospital. The Mahatma, burdened as he was, seemed to be in no hurry. He settled down to a leisurely conversation and asked me what sin I had committed. For after all how could anybody be ill if he had not committed a sin? So I told him that it must have been the sin of talking to Englishmen for too many hours! We laughed together and he added: 'You know

you must give me credit for one thing, I can always make you laugh.'

On 16th May, in the evening lying in my sickbed, I listened to the Secretary of State's broadcast making the famous statement setting out the Cabinet Mission's plan for transfer of power from Britain to India. My feverish brain could not take in all I heard but I was delighted to hear the piece which categorically rejected the idea of creating a Pakistan.

The Cabinet Mission firmly rejected Pakistan in these words:

'1. On March 15th last, just before the despatch of the Cabinet Delegation to India, Mr. Attlee, the British Prime Minister, used these words:

"My colleagues are going to India with the intention of using their utmost endeavours to help her to attain her freedom as speedily and fully as possible. What form of government is to replace the present régime is for India to decide; but our desire is to help her to set up forthwith the machinery for making that decision. . . . I hope that India and her people may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. I am certain that they will find great advantages in doing so. . . . But if she does so elect, it must be by her own free will. The British Commonwealth and Empire is not bound together by chains of external compulsion. It is a free association of free peoples. If, on the other hand, she elects for independence, in our view she has a right to do so. It will be for us to help to make the transition as smooth and easy as possible."

'2. Charged in these historic words we—the Cabinet Ministers and the Viceroy—have done our utmost to assist the two main political parties to reach agreement upon the fundamental issue of the unity or division of India. After prolonged discussions in New Delhi we succeeded in bringing the Congress and the Muslim League together in conference at Simla. There was a full exchange of views and both parties were prepared to make considerable concessions in order to try and reach a settlement but it ultimately proved impossible to close the remainder of the gap between the parties and so no agreement could be concluded. Since no agreement has been reached we feel that it is our duty to put forward what we consider are the best arrangements possible to ensure a speedy setting up of the new constitution. This Statement is made with the full approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom.



'3. We have accordingly decided that immediate arrangements should be made whereby Indians may decide the future constitution of India and an Interim Government may be set up at once to carry on the administration of British India until such time as a new constitution can be brought into being. We have endeavoured to be just to the smaller as well as to the larger sections of the people; and to recommend a solution which will lead to a practicable way of governing the India of the future and will give a sound basis for defence and a good opportunity for progress in the social, political and economic field.

'4. It is not intended in this Statement to review the voluminous evidence that has been submitted to the Mission; but it is right that we should state that it has shown an almost universal desire, outside the supporters of the Muslim League, for the unity of India.

'5. This consideration did not, however, deter us from examining closely and impartially the possibility of a partition of India; since we were greatly impressed by the very genuine and acute anxiety of the Muslims lest they should find themselves subjected to a perpetual Hindu majority rule.

'6. This feeling has become so strong and widespread amongst the Muslims that it cannot be allayed by mere paper safeguards. If there is to be internal peace in India it must be secured by measures which will assure to the Muslims a control in all matters vital to their culture, religion and economic or other interests.

'We therefore examined in the first instance the question of a separate and fully independent sovereign State of Pakistan as claimed by the Muslim League. Such a Pakistan would comprise two areas; one in the north-west consisting of the Provinces of the Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier, and British Baluchistan; the other in the north-east consisting of the Provinces of Bengal and Assam. The League were prepared to consider adjustment of boundaries at a later stage, but insisted that the principle of Pakistan should first be acknowledged. The argument for a separate State of Pakistan was based, first, upon the right of the Muslim majority to decide their method of government according to their wishes, and secondly, upon the necessity to include substantial areas in which Muslims are in a minority, in order to make Pakistan administratively and economically workable.

'The size of the non-Muslim minorities in a Pakistan comprising the whole of the six provinces enumerated above would be very considerable as the following figures show:

<i>North-Western Area</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Non-Muslim</i>
Punjab	16,217,242	12,201,577
North-West Frontier Province	2,788,797	249,270
Sind	3,208,325	1,326,683
Br. Baluchistan	438,930	62,701
	<hr/> 22,653,294	<hr/> 13,840,231
	62.07%	37.93%
 <i>North-Eastern Area</i>	 <i>Muslim</i>	 <i>Non-Muslim</i>
Bengal	33,005,434	27,301,091
Assam	3,442,479	6,762,254
	<hr/> 36,447,913	<hr/> 34,063,345
	51.69%	48.31%

The Muslim minorities in the remainder of British India number some 20 million dispersed amongst a total population of 188 million.

“These figures show that the setting up of a separate sovereign State of Pakistan on the lines claimed by the Muslim League would not solve the communal minority problem; nor can we see any justification for including within a sovereign Pakistan those districts of the Punjab and of Bengal and Assam in which the population is predominantly non-Muslim. Every argument that can be used in favour of Pakistan, can equally in our view be used in favour of the exclusion of the non-Muslim areas from Pakistan. This point would particularly affect the position of the Sikhs.

‘7. We therefore considered whether a small sovereign Pakistan confined to the Muslim majority areas alone might be a possible basis of compromise. Such a Pakistan is regarded by the Muslim League as quite impracticable because it would entail the exclusion from Pakistan of (a) the whole of the Ambala and Jullunder Division in the Punjab; (b) the whole of Assam except the district of Sylhet; and (c) a large part of Western Bengal, including Calcutta, in which city the Muslims form 23.6 per cent of the population. We ourselves are also convinced that any solution which involves a radical partition of the Punjab and Bengal, as this would do, would be contrary to the wishes and interests of a very large proportion of the inhabitants of these provinces. Bengal and the Punjab each has

its own common language and a long history and tradition. Moreover, any division of the Punjab would of necessity divide the Sikhs leaving substantial bodies of Sikhs on both sides of the boundary. We have therefore been forced to the conclusion that neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign State of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem.

'8. Apart from the great force of the foregoing arguments there are weighty administrative, economic and military considerations. The whole of the transportation and postal and telegraph systems of India have been established on the basis of a united India. To disintegrate them would gravely injure both parts of India. The case for a united defence is even stronger. The Indian armed forces have been built up for the defence of India as a whole, and to break them in two would inflict a deadly blow on the long traditions and high degree of efficiency of the Indian Army and would entail the gravest dangers. The Indian Navy and Indian Air force would become much less effective. The two sections of the suggested Pakistan contain the two most vulnerable frontiers in India and for a successful defence in depth the area of Pakistan would be insufficient.

'9. A further consideration of importance is the greater difficulty which the Indian States would find in associating themselves with a divided British India.

'10. Finally there is the geographical fact that the two halves of the proposed Pakistan State are separated by some seven hundred miles and the communications between them both in war and peace would be dependent on the goodwill of Hindustan.

'11. We are therefore unable to advise the British Government that the power which at present resides in British hands should be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign States.'

In order, however, to secure for the Muslims, who were not only a minority but the second majority in India, their fair share of power, the Cabinet Mission recommended the following basic form of the Constitution of India:

(1) There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which should deal with the following subjects: foreign affairs, defence and communications; and which should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.

(2) The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature

constituted from British-Indian and States representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.

(3) All subjects other than the Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the Provinces.

(4) The States will retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.

(5) Provinces should be free to form Groups with executives and legislatures, and each Group could determine the provincial subjects to be taken in common.

(6) The constitution of the Union and of the Groups should contain a provision whereby any province could, by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of 10 years and at 10 yearly intervals thereafter.

The Mission announced simultaneously that for the purpose of getting together an effective Government of India having the support of the major political parties, while the Constitution of future India was being hammered out, the Viceroy would get down immediately to the task of forming an Interim Government. The Mission thus threw a challenge to the moral capacity of the political leaders of India to take over power from the British without dividing India into two independent Sovereign States.

The debate between Gandhiji and the Secretary of State on the Mission's offer was at first warm and friendly but it soon became distressingly clear with the passage of each day that, with all their deep regard for each other, it was not possible to bridge the gulf that divided them. Gandhiji put out in his *Harijan* his analysis of the Mission's proposals in these words:

'After four days of searching examination of the State Paper issued by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy on behalf of the British Government, my conviction abides that it is the best document the British Government could have produced in the circumstances. It reflects our weakness, if we would be good enough to see it. The Congress and the Muslim League did not, could not agree.

We would grievously err if at this time we foolishly satisfy ourselves that the differences are a British creation. The Mission have not come all the way from England to exploit them. They have come to devise the easiest and quickest method of ending British rule. We must be brave enough to believe their declaration until the contrary is proved. Bravery thrives upon the deceit of the deceiver.

'My compliment, however, does not mean that what is best from the British standpoint is also best or even good from the Indian. Their best may possibly be harmful. My meaning will, I hope, be clear from what follows.

'The authors of the document have endeavoured to say fully what they mean. They have gathered from their talks the minimum they thought would bring the parties together for framing India's charter of freedom. Their one purpose is to end British rule as early as may be. They would do so, if they could, by their effort, leave a united India not torn asunder by internecine quarrel bordering on civil war. They would leave in any case. Since in Simla the two parties, though the Mission succeeded in bringing them together at the Conference table (with what patience and skill they could do so, they alone could tell) could not come to an agreement, nothing daunted, they descended to the plains of India, and devised a worthy document for the purpose of setting up the Constituent Assembly which should frame India's charter of independence, free of any British control or influence. It is an appeal and a piece of advice. It has no compulsion in it. Thus the Provincial Assemblies may or may not elect the delegates. The delegates, having been elected, may or may not join the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly having met, may lay down a procedure different from the one laid down in the Statement. Whatever is binding on any person or party arises out of the necessity of the situation. The separate voting is binding on both the majority parties, only because it is necessary for the existence of the Assembly and not otherwise. At the time of writing, I took up the Statement, re-read it clause by clause, and came to the conclusion that there was nothing in it binding in law. Honour and necessity alone are the two binding forces.

'What is binding is that part of it which commits the British Government. Hence, I suppose, the four members of the British Mission took the precaution of receiving full approval of the British Government and the two Houses of Parliament. The Mission are entitled to warm congratulations for the first step in the act of renunciation which the Statement is. Since other steps are necessary

for full renunciation, I have called this one a promissory note.

“Though the response to be made by India is to be voluntary, the authors have naturally assumed that the Indian parties are well organised and responsible bodies capable of doing voluntary acts as fully as, if not more fully than, compulsory acts. Therefore, when Lord Pethick-Lawrence said to a press correspondent, “If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it, if by a majority of each party they desire to do so”, he was right in the sense that those who became delegates, well knowing the contents of the Statement, were expected by the authors to abide by the basis, unless it was duly altered by the major parties. When two or more rival parties meet together, they do so under some understanding. A self-chosen umpire (in the absence of one chosen by the parties, the authors constitute themselves one) fancies that the parties will come together only if he presents them with a proposal containing a minimum and he makes his proposals, leaving them free to add to, subtract from or altogether change it by joint agreement.

“This is perfect so far. But what about the units? Are the Sikhs, for whom the Punjab is the only home in India, to consider themselves against their will, as part of the section which takes in Sind, Baluchistan and the Frontier Province? Or is the Frontier Province, also against its will, to belong to the Punjab called “B” in the Statement, or Assam to “C” although it is a character of the Statement that it demands that the liberty of the individual unit should be unimpaired. Any member of the sections is free to join it. The freedom to opt out is an additional safeguard. It can never be a substitute for the freedom retained in paragraph 15(5) which reads:

“Provinces should be free to form groups with executives and legislatures and each group could determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.”

‘It is clear that this freedom was not taken away by the authors of section 19 which “proposes” (does not order) what should be done. It presupposes that the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly at its first meeting will ask the delegates of the Provinces whether they would accept the group principle and if they do, whether they will accept the assignment given to their Province. This freedom inherent in every Province and that given by 15(5) will remain intact. There appears to me to be no other way of avoiding the apparent conflict between the two paragraphs as also the charge of compulsion which would immediately alter the noble character

of the document. I would, therefore, ask all those who are perturbed by the group proposal and the arbitrary assignment, that, if my interpretation is valid, there is not the slightest cause for perturbation.

'There are other things in the document which would puzzle any hasty reader who forgets that it is simply an appeal and a piece of advice to the nation showing how to achieve independence in the shortest time possible. The reason is clear. In the new world that is to emerge out of the present chaos, India in bondage will cease to be the "brightest jewel" in the British crown. It will become the blackest spot in that crown, so black that it will be fit only for the dustbin. Let me ask the reader to hope and pray with me that the British crown has a better use for Britain and the world. The "brightest jewel" is an arrogation. When the promissory note is fully honoured the British crown will have a unique jewel as of right flowing from due performance of duty.'

The Cabinet Mission, on the other hand, had explained at a Press Conference their position with regard to the fundamental question of the basis of the constitution-making body, in these words:

'The question was whether, as we had laid down certain provisions, the constitution making body or Constituent Assembly could be regarded in any sense as sovereign. Well, we only laid these conditions down because Indians did not come to an agreement among themselves. If it had been possible for the two Indian parties to come together to make a constitution, we should have made no stipulations of any kind. But when we got here, we found, what we suspected in advance, that a Constituent Assembly representing all parties could not be acceptable except on certain decisions taken in advance. We then asked the Indian parties whether they themselves by agreement would lay down certain decisions which would enable the Constituent Assembly to meet together and to function, and we tried our very best to get that agreed to and we went a considerable distance towards getting agreement on that point, but we did not get all the way, and therefore, only because of that we suggested this basis and we made these recommendations, because it is only on those that we felt that we could get representatives of all parties to sit together and try and draw up a constitution. But even so, I would point out to you that even that basis can be altered but it can only be altered by a separate majority of each

party who desire to do so and the reason is this that these representatives of different parties have never agreed to meet together on that basis. That is what we believe is the basis on which they will come together. If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it if by a majority of each party they desire to do so.'

The Secretary of State sent Gandhiji a copy of the transcript. It was for the first time, upon reading this transcript, that Gandhiji started addressing the Secretary of State as 'Dear Lord' instead of 'Dear Friend' or 'Dear Lord Pethick-Lawrence'. I was dismayed to see this. This was the signal of danger; they were losing their point of contact and drifting away from each other. Gandhiji said to Lord Pethick-Lawrence:

*Valmiki Mandir,  
New Delhi  
19th May, 1946*

Dear Lord,

In order to enable me the better to advise such of those who seek my advice, I venture to put before you my difficulty as follows:

You say in your answer to a question. 'If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it if by a majority of each party they desire to do so.' You can omit the last portion of the sentence as being superfluous for my purpose.

Even the basis in para. 15 of the State Paper is a recommendation. Do you regard a recommendation as obligatory on any member of the contemplated Constituent Assembly? There is such a ring about the quotation. Can those who enthusiastically welcome the Paper but are discerning enough to repudiate, for instance, grouping, honourably seek to educate the country and the Constituent Assembly against the grouping clause? If your answer is 'yes' does it not follow that the Frontier and Assam province delegates would be free to abstain from joining the sections to which they are arbitrarily assigned?



I know the legal position. My question has reference to the honourableness of opposition to grouping.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Lord Pethick-Lawrence*

On reading Gandhiji's 'analysis' for the *Harijan* of which an advance copy had been sent by Gandhiji to Sir Stafford, the Secretary of State expressed his indebtedness for Gandhiji's friendly remarks about the Mission and their Statement but made it quite plain, about some of the basic points at issue, that he held views that were quite different from Gandhiji's.

There followed one more formidable 'Dear Lord' epistle in which Gandhiji discussed some of the crucial points about which he wanted satisfaction:

*Valmiki Mandir,  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
20th May, 1946*

Dear Lord,

As the matters we discussed yesterday morning and the day before were very important and affected and still affect my attitude and corresponding action, I think it worth while to reduce a summary to writing. You can correct me if there is a misunderstanding. This may even help you wherever necessary.

I may add that I have conveyed to the Working Committee of the Congress the purport, to the best of my ability, of our talks.

With this preface I proceed to give the summary.

1. You were good enough to assure me that you will see to it that European members of provincial assemblies, neither voted at the elections of delegates to the Constituent Assembly nor expected to be elected by the electors of non-Muslim delegates.
2. Election of the possible 93 delegates on behalf of the States would be determined by the Nawab Sahib of Bhopal and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In the absence of an agreed solution, there should be no election of delegates on behalf of the States,

the function of looking after the interests of the Princes and their people devolving upon the Advisory Committee referred to in clause 20 of the State Paper.

3. In view of the fact that there is no machinery in British Baluchistan analogous to the provincial assemblies, it should be treated as the special concern of the Constituent Assembly and should be included in the function of the Advisory Committee. Meanwhile it should be the duty of the Interim National Government to set up machinery to bring Baluchistan on a par with the other provinces.

4. I ventured to suggest that Paramountcy should cease even while independence is at work, in fact, though not in law, till the Constituent Assembly has finished its labours and devised a constitution. Sir Stafford saw danger in acting upon my suggestion. I hold the opposite view. Acceptance of my proposal would vivify the people of the States as if by a stroke of the pen. And the Interim Government would be a boon to the Princes who, though the creation of the Paramount Power and dependent on it for the continuance of their existence, still chafed under its heavy hand. The immediate end of Paramountcy would test the sincerity of the Princes and the Paramount Power.

But if this Indian feeling did not find an echo in your hearts, I personally would be satisfied with Sir Stafford's view that Paramountcy which had been admittedly used to protect the Princes against their people in the shape of suppressing their liberty and progress, should for the time continue for the protection and progress of the people. If the people of the States are backward, it is not because they are different in kind from the people of the direct British parts of India but because they have been groaning under a double yoke. I endorsed also the suggestion that Paramountcy should be exercised in consultation with the National Government.

5. I have written to you on my difficulty on grouping. I need say nothing more on the subject, pending reply to it.

6. Whilst I appreciate your and Sir Stafford's frankness, I would put on record my conviction that Independence would in fact be a farce, if the British troops are in India even for peace and order within, or danger from without. The condition

of India after the labours of the Constituent Assembly are over will in this respect be no better than now. If the position about the troops persists, 'Independence next month' is either insincere or a thoughtless cry. Acceptance of 'Quit India' by the British is unconditional, whether the Constituent Assembly succeeds or fails in bringing out a constitution. A drastic revision of the attitude is a necessity in every case.

Finally it can in no way be contended that in the face of the troops, there would be natural behaviour in the Constituent Assembly.

7. As to the Interim Government, the more I think and observe, the more certain is my feeling that a proper National Government responsible in fact, if not in law, to the elected members of the Central Legislative Assembly, should precede the summons for the election of members of the Constituent Assembly. Only then, and not before, can a true picture of coming events be presented. The food crisis demands immediate formation of a strong, capable and homogeneous National Government. Without it, deep and universal corruption cannot end, without it the psychological effect will not be produced in spite of the landing on Indian shores of expected grain from outside. Every day's delay in forming such a Government is agony added to the agony of famished millions of India. There can therefore be no question of parity whether the Government is allowed to be formed by the Congress or the Muslim League. The best and incorruptible men or women from India are wanted for the purpose. I was therefore glad to find that the Viceroy was already moving in the matter as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Lord Pethick-Lawrence*

The Secretary of State very politely but firmly stuck to his own position and replied to say:

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi*

*21st May 1946*

My dear Gandhiji,

Since receiving your two letters of the 19th and the 20th we have had an official communication from the Congress raising the same points. As we intend shortly to reply to this letter I will not in this answer deal with the various matters you raise.

As some of the paragraphs in your second letter do not accord with my recollection or that of Sir Stafford, I am enclosing a note setting out the matters on which we differ. We confirm as you imply in your paragraphs 6 and 7 that we told you quite definitely that we could not agree with the propositions you there set out. The Delegation wish me in particular to make it plain that independence must follow and not precede the coming into operation of the new constitution.

All good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

(Enclosure to the above)

1. We gave no such assurance but stated that we were investigating the position on the lines stated.
2. On this matter we said there would have to be consultations as set out in paragraph 14 of the Statement which we read to you and that a part of them would no doubt be between the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes and the President of Congress.
3. This was your suggestion. We stated that it was proposed to appoint a person in the best way possible to ensure his representative character.
4. In the second paragraph you are misinterpreting what Sir Stafford said. He stated that he knew the view was held that in the past paramountcy had been used in certain cases to support the Princes against their people but that in the interim period the Crown Representative would want to help forward the movement towards democracy in the States so as to make it easier for them to come into

the union. It was also stated by us that Paramountcy would be exercised by the Crown Representative and that it would not be in consultation with the Interim Government, though there might be consultation between the Interim Government, and the States on matters of common economic interest.

The retort from Gandhiji sounded harsh. I was not sure that poor Lord Pethick-Lawrence deserved it:

*Valmiki Mandir,  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
22nd May 1946*

Dear Friend,

Whilst I thank you for your prompt reply to my letters, you will let me say that it is unfortunate. It has the old official flavour. Has the cry 'Independence in fact' no foundation?

I adhere to all that I have said in my letter of 20th. Your letter is in the best imperialistic style which I thought had gone for ever.

This is from an old friend.

I was deeply grieved to learn about Sir Stafford's illness. Let me hope that he will soon be better.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*The Rt. Hon'ble Lord  
Pethick-Lawrence*

Two days later the Congress Working Committee, in their meeting of 24th May, passed a resolution after prolonged deliberations. They stood for a strong but limited central authority; full autonomous status for each province; guaranteed fundamental rights; the opportunity for each Community to live the life of its choice. The Committee did not see how these could be fitted into the Mission's proposals. The real trouble was that the idea of compulsory 'grouping' of provinces was repugnant to Gandhiji and his colleagues. In the North-East, Assam was not a Muslim majority province but it was to be lumped together with Bengal, a Muslim majority province, in

order to create a substantial area over which the Muslim League could be the *de facto* rulers. Mr. Gopinath Bardoloi, the eminent Congress leader of Assam, shed tears before Gandhiji on behalf of the people of Assam. It seemed to him immoral and unjust. The North-West Frontier Province, although predominantly Muslim, was a stronghold of the Congress Party and provided the Congress Party with one of its greatest leaders, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. The idea of his province being lumped together with Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan to create a large Muslim majority area where the Muslim League could be the *de facto* rulers was repugnant to this great nationalist leader who was a saintly man and who was one of Gandhiji's closest colleagues. The injustice of being forced to be lumped together with social and political reactionaries seemed cruel to him; it would amount to throwing the brave Pathans into the jaws of the lions.

Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence felt that without agreement of the two parties in the take-over of power, any proposal made by the third party, the British, was bound to leave some people on both sides with a sense of injustice; there was no such thing as absolute justice in such a situation. To them this arrangement was an honest attempt at a compromise in order to satisfy the Muslim League that they had got what they considered their fair share of power. That, quite frankly, was the deliberate purpose of the grouping of provinces. Would not the division of India into two independent sovereign states and the creation of Pakistan be much worse than this? The Indian leaders had always claimed in the past that it was the third party that divided and ruled and the presence of the third party made it impossible for the two Indian parties to come to an agreement with each other. Could not the Indian leaders accept, they argued, the unsatisfactory British proposals, if for no other consideration, than to get rid of the third party? The British proposal was for a period of ten years, at the end of which it could be revised by the Indians in any way they liked; if during that critical period the majority was just and fair and kind to the minority would they not get adjusted to each other in the absence of the third party? So went the argument.

What Gandhiji really wanted was that power should be handed over to the majority party and the majority should be trusted to be just and fair to the minority. How could any majority, however large, run an effective Government in India if there was a minority of ninety million dissatisfied and unhappy Muslims in their midst. If the British had trusted Gandhiji and acted on his advice then he, Gandhi, would have constituted himself into the defender of the rights and privileges of the ninety million Muslims. And his power over the majority party was so unquestioned that he would have forced the majority party to be more than fair, more than just, and more than kind to the minority.

But the British had a conscientious objection to handing over a minority to a majority. They were not prepared to divide India and create a Pakistan; their objection was moral as well as political. At the same time they were not prepared to leave it to the majority to do what they liked with the minority. But they did not realize that in the complex Indian situation there could be no greater safeguard for the rights of the Muslim minority than to trust Gandhi to be the champion of their rights, the great cause for which Gandhi was ultimately crucified on 30th January 1948. They did not know Gandhi well enough and could not trust him and his judgement to that extent.

In the midst of this distressing and heartsearching debate that was going on between the majority party and the British Ministers, the Muslim League, on 6th June, passed a resolution accepting the Cabinet Mission's proposal contained in the historic 16th May statement. They made a number of reservations and pointed out that while the Mission had rejected Pakistan they had conceded 'the basis and the foundation' of Pakistan in the grouping of the six Muslim-majority provinces; but they accepted the Mission's long-term proposal of Constitution-making all the same. At this stage I came out of the hospital and resumed my daily perambulations between Gandhiji and the two Englishmen.

The British Ministers then turned their attention towards the formation of an Interim Government of India representing

the political parties—in the hope that if agreement could be reached between the two major parties on immediate sharing of power, then the disagreement over the long-term proposal for constitution-making might become easier of solution. But the basic conflict came to the surface very soon. Mr. Jinnah claimed, in a letter to the Viceroy on 8th June, that the Viceroy had given him an assurance in the course of discussion on the subject that there would be 12 portfolios, and the parties would be represented in the ratio of 5:5:2, i.e. five Muslim League nominees, five Congress Party nominees, and one Sikh and one Indian Christian or Anglo-Indian. The Viceroy denied that he had given any such assurance but admitted that he had indicated in the conversation that he had this ratio in mind. This 'parity' between the majority and minority, between the Muslim League and the Congress, was of course wholly unacceptable to the majority party. In giving Mr. Jinnah such an indication the Viceroy had seriously slipped up and the Secretary of State was disturbed about it. He sent for me on 12th June and told me how upset he was about it all. Was there no way of persuading Gandhiji to find a way out of this tangle? I told the Secretary of State that the only thing to do was to have a heart-to-heart talk with Gandhiji and to appeal to him for help. So he asked me if I could not fetch Gandhiji to his house for a talk that evening and wrote out this brief letter:

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
12th June 1946*

My dear Gandhiji,

It would be such a pleasure to me if you could come to see me to have a talk some time and I am thinking that 7.30 p.m. today at our home 2 Willingdon Crescent might suit you best.

Perhaps Sudhir Ghosh who is kindly carrying this note will ring up my Secretary Mr. Turnbull and confirm.

Yours sincerely

PETHICK-LAWRENCE



Gandhiji thought it was necessary to see the Viceroy and hear from him precisely what commitment he had actually made to Mr. Jinnah before he could advise the Secretary of State how to repair the damage. So he went to the Viceroy in the afternoon before he met his own colleagues in the Congress Working Committee and later, in the evening, went with me to the Secretary of State. He recorded his advice to these British friends in two letters he wrote to the Viceroy on 12th and 13th June.

*Valmiki Mandir  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
12th June, 1946*

Dear Friend,

From you, almost straightaway, I went to the Working Committee which, owing to his illness, was held at Maulana Saheb's quarters. I gave them the gist of our conversation, told them that I gladly endorsed your suggestion about the parties meeting to fix up names subject to the proviso that no party should talk of parity; you should invite them simply to submit to you a joint list of the Cabinet of the Provisional Interim Government which you would approve or, if you did not, you would invite them to submit a revised list bearing in mind your amendments, that the list should represent a coalition Government composed of persons of proved ability and incorruptibility. I suggested too that in the place of parity there should be active enforcement of the long-term provision in your joint statement that in all major communal issues there should be communal voting to decide them. I suggested also that in the event of absence of agreement between the parties in spite of all effort, you should examine the merits of the respective lists of the two parties and accept either the one or the other (not amalgam) and announce the names of the Interim Government, but that before that final step was taken you should closet yourselves until a joint list was prepared. I told the Working Committee that you had seemed to endorse my suggestions.

I told them further that, so far as I knew, it was a point of

honour with Congressmen that there could be no joint consultation in which Maulana Saheb was not associated with the talks. You said it was a sore point with Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah and I replied that the soreness was wholly unwarranted and that the Congress could not be expected to sacrifice its faithful servant of twenty-five years' standing whose self-sacrifice and devotion to the national cause had never been in question. But I told you that your great experience and ability to handle delicate matters would show you the way out of the difficulty.

Finally, I told the Committee that I drew your attention to the fact that the European vote which was being talked of was unthinkable, in connection with the Constituent Assembly and nothing but a public declaration by the European residents of India or one by you on their behalf could make possible the formation of the Constituent Assembly. I gathered from you that the question was already engaging your attention and that it should be satisfactorily solved.

Probably you have already moved in the matter of the joint talk. Nevertheless, I thought that I owed it to you and the Working Committee to put on record what I had reported about our talks. If I have in any way misunderstood you, will you please correct me?

I may say that the Working Committee had its draft letter ready but, at my suggestion, it postponed consideration of it pending the final result of your effort adumbrated in this letter. The draft letter takes the same view that I placed before you yesterday on parity and the European vote and their election as members of the contemplated Constituent Assembly.

I close with the hope that your effort will bear the fruit to which all are looking forward.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. the Viceroy,  
New Delhi*

In the second letter Gandhiji said:

*Bhangi Colony  
Reading Road, New Delhi  
13th June, 1946*

Dear Friend,

Lord Lawrence conveyed your thanks to me last night when he invited me to see him.

Please believe me when I say that I have never been guilty consciously of doing anything for thanks. 'Duty will be merit when debt becomes donation.' You are a very great soldier—a daring soldier. Dare to do the right. You must make your chioce of one horse or the other. So far as I can see you will never succeed in riding two at the same time. Choose the names submitted either by the Congress or the League. For God's sake do not make an incompatible mixture and in trying to do so produce a fearful explosion. Anyway, fix your time limit and tell us all to leave when that limit is over.

I hope I have made my meaning clear.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*H.E. Lord Wavell*

The Viceroy replied the next day to say:

*The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
13th June, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

Many thanks for your two letters of yesterday and today, I am grateful to you for writing and for your helpful suggestions which I will certainly bear in mind.

I had a talk with Sudhir Ghosh this morning and hope to see Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru again this afternoon.

Yours sincerely,

WAVELL

*M. K. Gandhi, Esq.*

As the Viceroy's letter indicates, I, too, was pressed into service and was sent to the Viceroy to explore possibilities of

resolving the difference between the Viceroy and the Congress Party about the formation of the Interim Government. But it seemed clear to me that there was no way of bridging the gulf. Gandhiji had come to the conclusion that the various permutations and combinations (the Viceroy had offered a revised formula of a Cabinet of 13 consisting of 6 congress nominees including a Scheduled-caste man, 5 Muslim League men and 2 of other minorities) of the distribution of portfolios to the parties could not conceal the basic lack of faith sundering the parties. The British had in his opinion no alternative but to choose one or the other, the Congress or the Muslim League. This he conveyed in a letter to Sir Stafford Cripps who was deeply upset to see that all his labour of months was about to end in rigid impasse.

*New Delhi*  
*13th June, 1946*

Dear Sir Stafford,

Sudhir told me something of the storm that is brewing within you. I met your good wife the day before.

I would ask you not to worry. You are handling the most difficult task of your life. As I see it the Mission is playing with fire. If you have courage you will do what I suggested from the very beginning. Even when the Parliamentary Delegation came before you I said then that you will not be able to have your cake and eat it. You will have to choose between the two—the Muslim League and the Congress, both your creations. Every day you pass here coquetting now with the Congress, now with the League and again with the Congress, wearing yourself away (This) will not do. Either you swear by what is right or by what the exigencies of British policy may dictate. In either case bravery is required. Only stick to the programme. Stick to your dates even though the heavens may fall. Leave by the 16th whether you allow the Congress to form a coalition or the League. If you think that the accumulated British wisdom must know better than these two creations of yours I have nothing to add. But I have fancied that you are not cast in that mould. If so, keep to your passage for the 16th and take your

poor wife with you to England and bury yourselves in private life unless the brave British announcement made is fulfilled to the Indian hope. A word to the wise.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

This reminded me of the warning I had given to Sir Stafford in my letter of 1st March 1946 to Woodrow Wyatt even before the Cabinet Mission left London, that an agreed solution acceptable to both the Congress and the Muslim League was out of the question and that the British had no alternative but to create a dictatorship of the majority and trust the majority to be just to the minority.

Sir Stafford in his reply showed, for the first time, some irritation with Gandhiji.

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House, New Delhi  
13th June, 1946*

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

Thank you for your letter. I am afraid you, like some others of us, are feeling somewhat impatient! But I always remember you advised me to show 'infinite patience' in dealing with these difficult matters. Certainly I shall never put my desire to return home and rest before my determination to leave nothing undone which may help a solution of the difficult problems here.

I can assure you neither I nor my colleagues lack courage to act but we want to temper that courage with prudence.

I still have great hopes that before we leave India, we may have helped towards a settlement of the problem.

In the meanwhile I send you my kindest regards and thanks for all your sympathy and care as to my illness.

Yours very sincerely,

R. STAFFORD CRIPPS

The tension had reached such a point that Sir Stafford's letter did not make Gandhiji less impatient. In fact the same day in the evening Gandhiji shot off a letter to the Secretary

of State, which the previous day Agatha Harrison, Horace Alexander and I advised Gandhiji not to send because it appeared to us that Gandhiji had misunderstood the two Englishmen and his letter was unjust and unfair to the British Ministers.

*New Delhi*  
*13th June, 1946*

Dear Friend,

I wrote to you a long letter yesterday, partly in fulfilment of my promise to send you a copy of the Rev. Nichols Roy's address, and if I could trace it Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah's address. I have not been able yet to lay (my) hands on the reference (which) I told you I had heard read to me. But I got the Muslim League Council's resolution which speaks volumes at any rate, for me. Both these things without my letter, I handed to Sudhir Ghosh to be given to you.

The letter I withheld at the instance of Agatha Harrison, Horace Alexander and Sudhir Ghosh who thought that it was likely to produce an effect contrary to what I had expected. I did not share their view because we have known each other for so many years. I lay no stress upon the fact that we have known each other for such a long time, for we have had no contact for years after our meeting during the stirring days of the Suffragette Movement. The bond that was then created could not, I felt, be easily snapped and so I presumed to write frankly to lay bare my mind to you. That I felt was due to you if I was to be a friendly adviser to the Mission which you are leading. Nevertheless I yielded to the advice of the three friends. I have told them that they are at liberty to describe to you the whole of the conversation between them and me.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Lord Pethick-Lawrence*

[Enclosure]

*Valmiki Mandir  
New Delhi  
12th June, 1946*

Dear Friend,

I promised to send you a copy of Rev. J. J. M. Nichols Roy's address. I do so herewith.

I have not yet traced Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah's address referring to the way the Interim Government, if formed, would work. But I have got the Muslim League Council's resolution. I send a cutting of it herewith. It speaks volumes for me.

On top of this comes the interview given by the President of the European Association. I spoke last evening at the prayer meeting without knowing anything of the latter which I hold to be a dangerous statement. It fills me with distrust of the future well-being through the proposed Constituent Assembly.

I suppose the *Statesman's* leading article today represents the general British attitude in India. The article is headed 'Slow Motion'. 'Deliberation, wariness, sobriety in an approach to great decisions are proper: but not swither and loquacity or delays due to mere tactical manœuvring.' All this is a prelude to what I consider an unwarranted attack on the Congress. If you of the Mission and the Viceroy share the view, you should really have no dealings with the Congress, however powerful or representative it may be. Naturally you should be the sole judge of what the Congress has appeared to you to be like.

For my part, as a detached observer, as I hold myself to be, I think that the Congress has not been procrastinating. It has been extraordinarily prompt in its dealings in connection with the work of the high mission which you are shouldering. But my purpose in writing this letter is to tell you that it will be wrong on my part if I advise the Congress to wait indefinitely until the Viceroy has formed the Interim Government or throws up the sponge in despair. Despair he must, if he expects to bring into being a coalition Government between two incompatibles. The safest, bravest and the straightest course is to invite that party to form a Government which, in the Viceroy's estimation, inspires greater confidence. Then there is a possibility within 24 hours of forming a National

Government. If, however, no party inspires confidence such a declaration should be made and the Viceroy should run the Government in the best way he knows. But the Congress Working Committee should not be delayed indefinitely. As for me, I would gladly stay behind if you want me to. But I feel that I shall be a useless adviser. I can only advise out of the fullness of trust. I become paralysed when distrust chokes me.

I am sorry to send you this letter. But I would be an unworthy friend if I disguised my feelings. You should know me as I am. Hence these tears.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

Horace Alexander, Agatha Harrison and I had dissuaded Gandhiji from sending this letter to Lord Pethick-Lawrence because we felt strongly that it was unfair to blame these two honest Englishmen for the irresponsible remarks of only one individual, Ian Stephens, Editor of the *Statesman*, who was a crank and represented nobody, not even the other members of the *Statesman* staff. And after all the *Statesman* newspaper did not represent the British Government. But the atmosphere was thick with mutual distrust. Other politicians were more distrustful than Gandhiji but their distrust was cleverly concealed; the mind of Gandhi was so shockingly honest that he allowed his opponents to see that he distrusted them and he did it with charming candour and without any trace of malice.

To cut across all this tangled mess the Cabinet Mission gave up its vain attempt to work out an agreed list of names for the Cabinet and decided to come out with its own proposal of names for the Interim Cabinet. This was announced by the Viceroy in a statement on 16th June and the fourteen names proposed were:

Five Congressmen: Mr. Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Mr. Harekrushna Mehtab; and

Five Muslim League men: Mr. Jinnah, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin, Nawab Mohammed Ismail Khan and Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar;



Four minority representatives: Sardar Baldev Singh (Sikh), Sir N. P. Engineer (Parsi), Dr. John Matthai (Christian), Mr. Jagjivan Ram (Scheduled Caste).

The list was very skilfully prepared. It gave Mr. Jinnah his 'parity' with the Congress in the sense that there were five Muslim League representatives and five proper Congress representatives who were all Hindus. It also cleverly secured a majority for the majority party in the sense that Mr. Jagjivan Ram, a Scheduled Caste representative, was a Congressman, anyhow, and Sardar Baldev Singh, the Sikh, and Dr. John Matthai, the enlightened Indian Christian, were going to work with the Congressmen (as later history shows they were both in Mr. Nehru's Government and loyally supported him), and Sir N. P. Engineer, the Parsi representative, who was a retired Government official, would in all probability throw in his lot with the majority party.

The British Cabinet Mission declared in the same statement: 'In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a coalition Government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of May 16.' The 16th May statement, i.e. the long-term plan for Constitution-making, had already been accepted by the Muslim League, on 6th June, with a number of reservations; the Congress Party had expressed its many doubts and misgivings about it but had not actually rejected it; its official verdict was still awaited. Cripps privately told me to tell Gandhiji that Jinnah had expressed a desire to be the Defence Member of the Government and he hoped Congress would satisfy his vanity by letting him have the Defence job; the Muslim League was only too willing to join the Government.

For Gandhiji the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim in the Congress team was a vital matter of principle. How could Gandhi who fought all his life against communal fanaticism accept that the Congress Party of which he was the maker represented only the Hindus of India and that, too, only the

caste Hindus. He would rather die than reduce Congress to that status. He warned the Congress Working Committee that if they submitted to this kind of demand he would leave Delhi and would have nothing further to do with any discussion for the formation of an interim Government. The head of the Congress Party, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was himself an eminent Muslim. It would be suicidal for Congress to agree that it could not nominate its own President to be a member of the Congress team in the Government. Gandhiji personally pleaded with the Maulana that he himself should be the Congress Muslim on the Government and one of the Congress Hindus should drop out. For after all the Maulana's position as President of the Congress Party was unquestioned. The Maulana could not be called a Muslim who was a 'stooge' of the Congress Party. As later history showed the Maulana was only too willing to be a Minister in Mr. Nehru's Government; but at that moment he firmly refused to agree in spite of Gandhiji's pleading. He did not disclose the reasons for his refusal. This came out within a few days.

Mr. Pyarelal, Gandhiji's principal secretary, has recorded in his book *The Last Phase* (p. 234) the following extract from his scrupulously kept diary, dated 22nd June 1946:

'Sudhir Ghosh saw Cripps. He reported that Cripps has told him that the Congress stand in regard to the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim was absolutely logical and legitimate but could not the Working Committee waive it? They had proceeded on a written assurance which they had received from the Maulana Saheb that the Working Committee would not stick out on that point. And now they felt themselves placed in a awkward position. On Sudhir asking why they could not entrust the power to the League if the Congress declined to accept it on the Cabinet Mission's terms, Cripps replied that they did not feel that the League by itself could be entrusted with it.

' "Then why not entrust it to the Congress?"

' "For that we shall need the authority of H.M.G."

' "Could not that be done from here?"

' "No, that would require personal discussion."

MGE

'At noon, a letter was received from the Viceroy asking the Congress President not to press the demand about the inclusion of a Muslim of their choice among the representatives of the Congress in the Interim Government. It achieved what Bapu's persuasion had failed to do so far. On the question being put to the vote in the Working Committee all except one were opposed to the acceptance of power on those terms. The one exception was of course the Maulana.'

On 22nd June, with Congress Working Committee's decision not to enter into the Interim Government because of the Viceroy's refusal to accept a Congress Muslim amongst the Congress nominees, everything seemed to have crumbled. It was a sad day for all of us who had worked so hard for full three months day and night in the hope of peaceful transfer of power. But the unhappiest of all were Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence. They had worked with so much dedication. In the evening of that day they sent for me and asked me if I could think of anything that would salvage something out of the wreckage around them. As we were talking in subdued voices, sitting in the living-room of No. 2 Willingdon Crescent, A. V. Alexander the third member of the Mission walked in. He was passing through the room and as he saw me there he stopped abruptly and, wagging his forefinger at me, this rough diamond of a man, who had risen from the position of office messenger to that of First Lord of the Admiralty, said: 'Ah, here is the man I have been looking for. We have been sweating for three months in the damnable heat of your country to help you to take over power from us; and what do we get in return for all our labour? A lot of filthy suspicion about our bona fides? And, pray, what have we done to deserve that? It is your old man who has wrecked all our effort. Your old man has gone back on his word of honour. He gives us an assurance that there would be no Muslim in the Congress team in the Government. He gives that assurance in writing. And then he backs out of it. I call that a pretty poor show.'

Albert Alexander was obviously very angry with Gandhiji but I was puzzled to hear about this extraordinary accusation that Gandhiji had given them an assurance that there would be

no Congress Muslim in the Interim Government. So I asked Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence what this outburst was all about. Cripps said, 'Well, Sudhir, there is a letter that the Maulana wrote to the Viceroy. He did say in this letter that he would see to it that no Muslim name was included in the Congress list, and if his own name was proposed he would not agree to the inclusion of his name.' I then understood why the Maulana had refused to be a Congress nominee in the Government in spite of all Gandhiji's pleading.

In the course of this conversation I told Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence that the only advice I could give them about salvaging something out of the wreckage was that they should have a private talk with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the only man amongst the Congress leaders who was a practical statesman; he was not swayed by emotion. If there was anybody who could suggest a way out of this mess it was Vallabhbhai. Lord Pethick-Lawrence said that next morning, Sunday morning, he was going to be at the little Quaker prayer meeting to be held at the Y.W.C.A. where Agatha Harrison was staying; after the prayer meeting would I take him to Vallabhbhai Patel wherever he was. I agreed to do so.

I went back that evening of 22nd June to Gandhiji at the Bhangi Colony as the purveyor of bad news. Gandhiji was deeply hurt to hear the story of the Maulana's letter to the Viceroy and the assurance that there would be no Congress Muslim in the Government. He was not shocked: because it was the second time that the Maulana had written such a letter to the Mission without the knowledge and approval of his colleagues. His motive was obviously good; he wanted a peaceful settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League and was prepared to pay the price demanded by Mr. Jinnah. For Gandhiji it meant the moral death of the Congress. He had another sleepless night. This time, of course, Mr. Nehru could not accuse me of mischief-making because, later the same evening, George Abell had taken the trouble to meet Rajkumari Amrit Kaur for the express purpose of making it known to her that such a letter with the assurance given by the Maulana did exist in their possession, and in Abell's view Mr. Gandhi was being

unnecessarily difficult. I was therefore not the only purveyor of unpleasant information.

The search for Vallabhbhai Patel next morning, Sunday, 23rd June, was quite an experience. At the Quaker meeting where Gandhiji and the Secretary of State were both present, I broke the silence to say how heartbreaking it was to watch two groups of high-minded men—one Indian and another British—wanting to do nothing but the right thing but failing to reach each other, and how painful the tragedy of it all was. Gandhiji and Lord Pethick-Lawrence sat quietly through the hour's silence. I wondered if they felt like two schoolboys who were being reprimanded by an elder!

After the prayer meeting the Secretary of State asked me to get into his car and we asked the chauffeur to drive down to Mr. Birla's house in Albuquerque Road (now called Tees January Marg—in memory of the black Friday, 30th January 1948, when Gandhiji was killed at the house by a Hindu fanatic) where Vallabhbhai Patel was staying. But the Secretary of State did not wish to go into Mr. Birla's house. So he asked the chauffeur to stop the car under the jamun trees outside on the road and I walked in to look for Vallabhbhai; it was almost like two schoolboys on an escapade! But Vallabhbhai was not to be found there; I was told that Vallabhbhai had gone to see Gandhiji at the Bhangi Colony on Reading Road. So the Secretary of State and I proceeded towards Reading Road. As we approached the Roman Catholic Cathedral on Irwin Road we saw Vallabhbhai and his daughter, Maniben, coming from the opposite side in another car. I raised my hand and the car stopped. I walked over to Vallabhbhai and told him that the Secretary of State was anxious to talk with him; would he join us in the other car. We had a few words and decided that we had better go to No. 2 Willingdon Crescent where the Secretary of State was staying, instead of settling the future of India standing there on the road in front of the Gole Post Office. The half an hour's discussion that followed at 2 Willingdon Crescent, made history. Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. Alexander joined us. This was the first time that the Cabinet Mission met Vallabhbhai alone; they had only seen him as a member of a

team of Congress negotiators headed by Maulana Azad in Simla. Vallabhbhai, the great organizer and practical statesman, came to a conclusion within half an hour as to what could be done and what could not be done. The Secretary of State said that he had seen reports in the newspapers that the Congress Working Committee had decided to reject the Viceroy's proposals announced on 16th June, for the formation of an Interim Government, and it had already indicated its dissatisfaction with the long-term proposal for constitution-making, as announced by the Mission on 16th May, although the Mission had not yet received the formal letter of rejection. After the Congress Party had sent in their rejection of both, which seemed imminent, the position officially would be that the Muslim League had accepted the long-term plan of constitution-making, and was only too willing to come into the Interim Government while Congress had rejected both and, logically, it would become necessary for the Viceroy to ask the Muslim League to form a Government because the announcement on this subject said:

'In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a Coalition Government, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of May 16.'

At this stage, I intervened to point out that surely Gandhiji's real objection was to Congress joining the Government on the basis of 'parity' with the League and without a Congress Muslim amongst its nominees, for he would not allow Congress to reduce itself to the status of being the organization representing the Hindus of India; but he did not have a similar strong objection to the long-term plan for constitution-making. Surely his misgivings with regard to paragraph 19 of the 16th May statement dealing with the grouping of provinces could be removed by the Mission, and his other objection with regard to the Europeans in India (who had a number of seats in the provincial Assemblies) getting some seats in the Constituent Assembly could be removed if the British Government told the

Europeans informally but firmly that they were not to exercise their voting right; the Europeans in India would not dare disobey the British Government. Vallabhbhai liked this argument and pointed out to the Mission that if they could scrap the whole discussion that had taken place with all the parties on the subject of forming an Interim Government, and if the Mission would give Gandhiji satisfactory assurances about the two points I had raised, then he thought he could persuade the Congress Working Committee to accept the long-term proposals for constitution-making and the matter of forming an Interim Government could be settled on a clean slate at a later date. This threw a new light on the atmosphere of darkness. Sir Stafford Cripps quickly drafted a sentence on a piece of paper and showed it to Sardar: Read 'for the purposes of the declaration of May 16' in place of 'for the purposes of para 19 of the declaration of May 16'. Paragraph 19 of the state paper dealt with the grouping of provinces, and the Government had issued a form of pledge to the speakers of the State Legislatures to be signed by candidates seeking election to the Constituent Assembly; the wording of these forms showed that the candidates were seeking election to the Constitution-making body for the purposes of paragraph 19 of the Cabinet Mission's statement of 16th May, which caused the suspicion that every member was being committed to the formation of groups of provinces and they were not free agents in this matter. The elucidation suggested by Sir Stafford Cripps would make it clear that the pledge that Members of the Constituent Assembly had to sign would require them only to co-operate in framing a Constitution of India. The Mission also gave Vallabhbhai the assurance that they would see to it that the Europeans in the State Legislatures did not put up candidates or participate in the voting for election to the Constituent Assembly. Vallabhbhai felt that on the strength of these two things he could persuade Congress to accept the long-term proposals for Constitution-making while rejecting the short-term plan for forming an Interim Government. Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence were grateful to Sardar. They decided that they would meet Gandhiji after Sardar has spoken to him about this discussion.

The next job was to satisfy Gandhiji. Sardar reported to Gandhiji the conversation he had with the British Ministers. Mr. Pyarelal has recorded in his book, the following paragraph from his diary, dated 24th June 1946:

‘In the morning today when Sudhir came to see Bapu he said that last night he had seen Cripps. The latter had told him that they had decided that if Congress accepted the long-term plan and rejected the short-term proposal, all that the Cabinet Mission had done under the 16th June declaration for the formation of an Interim Government would be scrapped and an attempt made *de novo* for the same. They invited Bapu and Sardar to meet them. They seem to have made up their minds to clear up the mess created by the assurances given to Jinnah by Lord Wavell. At seven a.m. Bapu accompanied by Sardar and Sudhir went to meet the Cabinet Mission.’

Before he went to see the British Ministers that morning of 24th June Gandhiji wrote on a slip of paper (it was his day of silence) for me; ‘As you have been go-between I suggest that you too should be present if they don’t mind. Ascertain from them.’ To this day I have preserved this historical piece of paper.\* Whenever Gandhiji went to see the Viceroy and the British Cabinet Ministers he took me with him but I was not always present at the discussion. I used to wait for him in the next room. Gandhiji liked to talk with me in the car on the way to these meetings and often tried out his thoughts on me as a sounding board; after the meeting he liked to tell me, on the way back, all that was discussed and his own assessment of it and often asked me how I reacted to it all. But this time he was anxious to make sure that I was present at the talk with the British Ministers. I spoke to Sir Stafford on the telephone and he said he and his colleagues would, of course, be happy if I took part in the discussion. Thus Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai and I met the Cabinet Ministers at 7 o’clock on the fateful morning on 24th June 1946.

As it was a Monday and Gandhiji was observing his silence for the day he wrote out on small pieces of papers what he had to say and sitting beside him I read out what he wrote.

\* See Plate 10.



Mr. Pyarelal has carefully preserved these small pieces of paper in the Gandhi archives (see Plate 11). Cripps explained briefly what he had told me the previous day; on the first piece of paper Gandhiji said:

I understood from Sudhir something quite *different*. I understood that you proposed to scrap the whole plan of Interim Government as it has gone on up to now and consider the situation *de novo*.

I read out these words but I had to intervene to explain that Sir Stafford was not really saying anything different. Sir Stafford himself explained at some length that what they meant was that if Congress accepted the long-term plan of Constitution-making, even if it was unable to accept the short-term plan of an Interim Coalition Government, then what would remain was the acceptance by both Congress and the Muslim League, of the Constitution-making plan and, in terms of the commitment made by them, a Government representative of both would be got together—at a suitable date; if Congress rejected both then Mr. Jinnah could ask them to go ahead with a Government representing those who had accepted the 16th May (Constitution-making) proposal, i.e. only the Muslim League.

After listening to this explanation Gandhiji wrote down on his bits of paper:

‘Then if you say that you will form a Government out of the acceptances it won’t work, as far as I can see. If you are not in a desperate hurry and if you would discuss the thing with me, I would gladly do so after I have opened my lips i.e. after 8 p.m. Meanwhile you should have, if you do not mind, the [Congress] Working Committee letter of rejection of the proposal contained in the Viceroy’s letter of 22nd instant. In my opinion that letter puts a new appearance on the Interim Government. The object of the Working Committee so far as I know is to help the Mission, not to hinder it except when its project results in the Working Committee committing suicide. Sudhir’s talk led me to see light through the prevailing darkness. But is there really light?’

‘As to the Constituent Assembly, I was quite clear up to yesterday afternoon that the Congress should work the Constituent Assembly to the best of its ability. But the rules I read yesterday have revolu-

tionized my mentality. There is a serious flaw. I accuse nobody. But a flaw is a flaw. The three parties must not work with three minds and hope for success.'

The flaw that Gandhiji was talking about was the flaw in the instructions issued by the Government to the Speakers of the State Legislatures that candidates for election to the Constituent Assembly were to sign a pledge that they were to frame a Constitution in terms of Paragraph 19 of the 16th May State paper (which provided for the grouping of provinces). The meaning of the State paper was that they were free to form groups of provinces but they were not necessarily meeting for that specific purpose.

Sir Stafford Cripps explained that it was the mission's intention to rectify the 'flaw' as Gandhiji called it. Thereafter Gandhiji wrote:

"Then you should not isolate a particular section from the whole. Why not say "under the state paper as a whole"?"

Sir Stafford Cripps said that that clarification could certainly be made. Gandhiji scribbled his last remark:

'However, I would gladly discuss this question also with you in the evening. I am sorry to cause you all this trouble. I only hope that you perceive my object in all this effort.'

It seemed clear that Gandhiji had relented. Gandhiji and the British Ministers along with the Viceroy arranged to get together again in the evening at the Viceroy's House in a formal meeting of the Mission. On our way back in the car, Sardar Vallabhbhai asked Gandhiji, 'Well, you raised doubts as regards paragraph 19. They have given you a clear assurance on that. What more do you want?' Gandhiji still had some doubt left in his mind. So they both asked me what my impression was. I told them that I was convinced that the Mission was prepared to concede what Gandhiji had asked for.

During the fateful meeting of that Monday morning the British Ministers noticed how practical and helpful Sardar Vallabhbhai was in his attitude. Later in the morning Frank Turnbull, Private Secretary to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, rang

me up to ask me if I could not persuade Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to be present at the meeting that was to be held in the evening at the Viceroy's House. Sardar was neither the head of the Congress Party nor did he have Gandhiji's special position. He told me that he could be present at the meeting only if he was specially invited by the Secretary of State, which explains the following letter addressed to me on the Secretary of State's behalf:

*Office of the Cabinet Delegation  
The Viceroy's House  
New Delhi  
24.6.46*

Dear Sudhir Ghosh,

As Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel came with Mr. Gandhi when he visited the Ministers at Willingdon Crescent this morning, it has occurred to the Delegation that possibly Mr. Gandhi might like Sardar Patel to accompany him when he comes to see the Delegation and H.E. the Viceroy this evening. The Delegation have therefore asked me to let you know that if Mr. Gandhi would like Sardar Patel to come he would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely,

F. F. TURNBULL

*Sudhir Ghosh, Esq.*

I was not Vallabhbhai's private secretary but we were close to each other. So Vallabhbhai accepted the invitation although the letter was addressed to me.

In the meeting with the Cabinet Mission that evening of 24th June, to which he accompanied Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai was convinced that the explanation given by the Mission in regard to the form of pledge for Members seeking election to the Constituent Assembly, which was issued by the Reforms Department of the Government without the knowledge of the British Ministers, was quite adequate. Gandhiji, however, still had his doubts and misgivings and at night on 24th June he recorded these doubts and misgivings in a letter to Sir Stafford Cripps:

*Bhangi Colony  
Reading Road  
New Delhi  
24th June 1946*

Dear Sir Stafford,

My whole heart goes out to you and Lady Cripps. I would far rather not write this note. But I must; in spite of the readiness as it seems to me, of the Working Committee to go in for the Constituent Assembly I would not be able to advise the leap in the dark. The light that Sudhir enabled me to see through the prevailing darkness seems to have vanished. There is nothing but a vacuum after you throw all the commitments on the scrap heap, if you really do intend to do so. I could not very well press for fuller information at our talk. The instructions to the Governors, innocuous as they have proved to be, have opened up a dreadful vista. I, therefore, propose to advise the Working Committee not to accept the long term proposition without its being connected with the Interim Government. I must not act against my instinct and shall advise them to be guided solely by their own judgement. I shall simply say that conversation gave me no light to dispel the darkness surrounding me. I shall say I had nothing tangible to prove that there were danger signals.

I am sorry to send you this letter. But I just thought it was my duty to put before you my feeling before sharing it with the Working Committee which meets at Maulana Saheb's house tomorrow at 6.30 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

*Sir Stafford Cripps*

In the meeting of the Congress Working Committee next day, 25th June, Vallabhbhai vigorously pleaded that the prestige of Congress would be severely damaged if the acceptance of the proposal for constitution-making was withheld any further. Vallabhbhai carried the day and on 25th June the Congress Party conveyed its formal decision to the Cabinet

Mission to accept the long-term proposal of constitution-making while rejecting the short-term proposal of an Interim Government. Vallabhbhai salvaged for them half of the fruits of their three months' labour and the Cabinet Ministers who left India on 29th June 1946 were more than grateful to him.

The day before they left New Delhi, in the evening of 28th June, Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Pethick-Lawrence invited the 'Trinity', Agatha Harrison, Horace Alexander and myself, to spend the evening with them at No. 2 Willingdon Crescent where they were staying. It was their way of saying: 'Thank you'. We had a quiet dinner and had a quiet talk afterwards, over coffee, about our successes and failures in the past three historic months. In the course of this quiet conversation Stafford gave us a definition of the basic difference between a totalitarian society and a free society, which was rather moving. The gentle Pethick (Lord Pethick-Lawrence was affectionately called Pethick by his friends) asked Stafford, apropos of nothing: 'Well, Stafford, you know Soviet Russia. You have been Ambassador there. Tell us—what kind of society have they built up?' Stafford said: 'Well, Pethick, it is easy to explain. There cannot be a phenomenon like Sudhir in that kind of society.' So we asked him what did he actually mean. 'Well, you know,' he said, 'here is Sudhir, a young Indian, whom we had never met in our lives—until we came to India three months ago. All we knew about him was what Dick Casey told us about him and his relationship with Gandhi before we came to India. We have seen him as Gandhi's young man these three months—almost every day and many times a day and at night. On many occasions he has told Gandhi that he was unjust to us and had misunderstood us; he has not hesitated to tell us where we have failed to trust Gandhi and have made a mess of our job. He has functioned as the emissary of our principal opponent but we have not hesitated to tell him what are considered secrets. And we did not know him three months ago! Such a thing cannot happen in the Russian kind of society. That is the real difference between our kind of society and their kind of society.'

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Lonely Pilgrim*

**I**T WAS characteristic of Gandhiji that he stoutly defended the Congress Working Committee's action in accepting the proposal of Constitution-making although his colleagues had taken the decision against his will. In spite of vigorous opposition from the Socialist Wing of the Party led by Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan at the 7th July meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay, the party accepted the British Plan by 204 votes against 51. Gandhiji said to the Party:

'I am willing to admit that the proposed Constituent Assembly is not the Parliament of the people. It has many defects. But you are all seasoned and veteran fighters. A soldier is never afraid of dangers. If there are shortcomings in the proposed Constituent Assembly, it is for you to get them removed. It should be a challenge to combat, not a ground for rejection. I am surprised that Shri Jayaprakash Narayan said yesterday that it would be dangerous to participate in the proposed Constituent Assembly and they should, therefore, reject the Working Committee's resolution.'

It was also characteristic of Mr. Nehru that after accepting the long-term Plan for Constitution-making while rejecting the short-term plan for an Interim Government, he said at the Party meeting, on the 6th July at Bombay, when he took over the Presidentship from Maulana Azad, that it was not a question of the Congress accepting any plan, long or short. 'We are not bound,' he said, 'by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go to the Constituent Assembly.' Of all places, at a Press Conference, he said that there was a four to one chance of the North-West Frontier Province deciding against joining the Group 'B', which would

thus collapse, and added: 'I can say with every assurance and conviction that there is going to be no grouping in Bengal-Assam, because Assam will never tolerate it under any circumstances whatever.' Mr. Jinnah immediately denounced Mr. Nehru's statement as 'a complete repudiation of the basic form upon which the long-term scheme rests and all its fundamentals and obligations and rights of parties accepting the scheme'. The British Cabinet Mission had made it abundantly plain to Mr. Nehru and his colleagues before they accepted the 16th May proposal of Constitution-making that even the 'basis' referred to by Mr. Jinnah could be altered but it could be done by the majority action of either party. The Secretary of State had said at that time on the subject: 'If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it if by a majority of each party they desire to do so.' It was, therefore, unfortunate for a man of Mr. Nehru's position to say that he was free to do what he liked with the British proposal for Constitution-making and the acceptance of the proposal by his Party implied no obligation. Mr. Jinnah reacted strongly to Mr. Nehru's statement. As it was, Mr. Jinnah was smarting under his disappointment over not being asked to form an Interim Government, although he had accepted both the long-term and short-term plan of the British Government.

At a meeting of the Council of the Muslim League in Bombay on 27th July, Mr. Jinnah, who had, in fact, given up his demand for Pakistan by accepting the British proposal for Constitution-making, withdrew the Muslim League's acceptance of the British Plan and announced that the League had 'no alternative but to adhere once more to the national goal of Pakistan'. He denounced Stafford Cripps and Vallabhbhai Patel in a violent speech in Bombay the next day.

In the meantime I had reached London. Before the Cabinet Mission left Delhi for London Sir Stafford Cripps had asked Gandhiji to send me to London. On 2nd July Gandhiji wrote for me a letter of introduction to Prime Minister Attlee in which he described me as 'a reliable and steady bridge between Great Britain and India'. This exceptional compliment

intrigued me and I asked Gandhiji if he meant it. He said: 'Remember that Gandhi never puts his pen to paper if he does not mean what he writes.' He did not forget that a trip to England and back by air plus a stay of two or three months was going to be costly and he knew that I could not afford it. I told him that Vallabhbhai Patel, the Treasurer of Congress, had told me that this was no problem. Gandhiji said he would not allow me to take any money from the Congress. He did not want me to go to London as an agent of the Congress Party; I was going there at the instance of the British Ministers with his full consent and I must be independent of the Congress. At his suggestion Mr. J. R. D. Tata promptly provided the wherewithal.

A typical and revealing complication arose when I went to purchase my ticket. All foreign travel was in wartime controlled by the Government. Sir Stafford Cripps had told me before he left New Delhi that the Cabinet Mission was going to leave instructions with the Viceroy's office to provide travel facilities. When I spoke to George Abell, the Viceroy's Private Secretary, he said that there was some difficulty. His Excellency, the Viceroy, felt that, if Mr. Ghosh was to go to London, then Mr. Jinnah, too, should be asked if he wished to send a representative to London. This rigid protocol was typical of the attitude of the Viceroy and the principal British bureaucrats in those days. My explanation that I was not going to London on behalf of the Congress Party was dismissed. I wrote at once to Sir Stafford Cripps and told him of the objection raised by the Viceroy. In a reply dated 19th July 1946, his private secretary said:

*Board of Trade  
Mill Bank, S.W.1  
19 July 1946*

Dear Sudhir,

Sir Stafford Cripps has asked me to reply to your letter of July 8th.

He is sorry, as we all are, that misunderstandings seem to have occurred about your transport to the United Kingdom



and hopes that by the time you get this letter these will have been cleared up.

Yours ever,

GEORGE B. BLAKER

*Sudhir Ghosh, Esq.*

Almost at once I was informed by the Viceroy's Private Secretary that the B.O.A.C. would accept my reservation. In London I discovered that there had been a rapid exchange of telegrams between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy on the subject of my trip to London—the Secretary of State had to tell Lord Wavell firmly that there was no question of asking Mr. Jinnah to send his representative to London. Mr. Ghosh was not going there in any official or delegated capacity either on behalf of Mr. Gandhi or the Congress Party. He was in fact going to London at the suggestion of the Secretary of State and Sir Stafford Cripps who felt that Mr. Ghosh's presence there would be useful to them. The length to which the insistence on 'parity' between the Congress and the Muslim League could go was indeed absurd!

On 27th July, soon after my arrival in London, Mr. Jinnah launched his offensive against the parties and individuals striving for a United India. He reversed the Muslim League's acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's plan for Constitution-making in India and called for 'Direct Action' with effect from 16th August 1946. Lord Pethick-Lawrence summoned me to his office and said in great distress: 'Now you see what Nehru has done. By his irresponsible statement at a Press Conference in Bombay he has given Jinnah precisely the excuse he was looking for to get out of his commitment.' However, he felt that one last effort should be made to persuade Mr. Jinnah to co-operate and this effort should be made by Mr. Nehru instead of the Viceroy. He urged Mr. Nehru to confront Mr. Jinnah personally and make one more effort to see if it was at all possible to secure the participation of the Muslim League in an Interim Government on reasonable terms. This failing, the only course open to the British Government would be to proceed with the formation of the Government without the

Muslim League. But he deeply regretted the thoughtless action of Mr. Nehru. He asked me if I could not privately communicate the substance of his conversation with me to Gandhiji so that he could persuade Mr. Nehru to see Mr. Jinnah.

It was not easy to send a message from London to Gandhiji in Sevagram without its contents being monitored by the Government of India, and, by successive stages, reaching Mr. Jinnah. I had talked to Vallabhbhai on the telephone from London a few days earlier. Sir Stafford Cripps promptly sent for me and told me that such conversations were not at all private. Since my talk had been duly reported to the Government, I should find some other method of communicating my confidential messages to India. On 4th August I sent an open cable to Gandhiji at Sevagram to warn him that I had sent him an important airmail message to be read before the Working Committee meeting:

*Gandhiji*  
*Sevagram*  
*Wardha*

For various reasons have not communicated with you so far (stop) Have now something to say to you before Working Committee meeting (stop) Have said it fully in air letter which will reach you Friday (stop) Friends at this end look to you for help at this stage (stop) They hope you will persuade Congress to reiterate their determination to make a good job of Constituent Assembly and to do justice to all minorities including the biggest and not to take much notice of recent outbursts and threats which were correctly assessed at this end (stop) They hope Congress President will express willingness to make one last effort to get together coalition government if asked to do so and if it was possible on just and reasonable terms (stop) If the other party still refuses to play the game I have no doubt logical and right steps will be taken (stop) Hope Congress will now come forward and take initiative off the hands of the third party (stop) Love from Sudhir 18 Grosvenor Place London

NGE

I wrote out a message for Gandhiji elaborating the cable and addressed the envelope to my wife. Instead of posting it, I handed it to the London Office of Tata's with the request to send it with routine business mail to their Bombay office and then to forward it by messenger to my wife in New Delhi. This was promptly done by Tata's. This letter was the main subject of discussion at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee held at Wardha on 8th August 1946.

*London*  
*4th August, 1946*

Dear Bapu,

After Jinnah's threat (of Direct Action) the British Cabinet asked the Viceroy to send for Jinnah and tell Jinnah that if he was not prepared to play the game British Cabinet had decided to hand over responsibility to Congress and such other people as were prepared to work with them and to go ahead without Jinnah. Viceroy pleaded that calling Jinnah immediately after the threat would give the impression that the British were frightened by his threat and suggested not seeing Jinnah. The Cabinet agreed.

Jinnah's outburst has really been a useful thing. It has simplified matters. It has given the Ministers as well as the administration here and in India the good shaking that they badly needed. They no longer think, as they have always done, that the Congress people are their enemies and the Muslims are their friends. They now know who are their friends and who are not their friends. Jinnah's threat has done a great deal of good. He has overplayed his hand and has burnt his boat.

The Cabinet has decided that responsibility is to be made over to Congress in the immediate future. Necessary instructions have been given to their representative. They however earnestly suggest to you that a final effort should be made to bring the League into the Government—if that is at all possible on just and reasonable terms. They realise that it is no use the Viceroy doing anything about it. They suggest that Congress President without waiting for an invitation and without standing on ceremony should take this job off the Viceroy's hands. It is suggested that President should go and see the

Viceroy and tell him that he is prepared to do all he can to help and would be willing to go to Mr. Jinnah and see if he is at all prepared to play the game. Viceroy has instructions to agree immediately to such a proposal. This really amounts to Viceroy asking Congress President to form a Government. If Mr. Jinnah refuses to co-operate and demands terms which Congress President cannot possibly accept, President should inform Viceroy that he has done his best and it really is not possible to work with Mr. Jinnah. Such a final effort will only show Congress reasonableness and magnanimity and will increase Congress prestige in the eyes of the world. Stock of Congress in the eyes of British Government is much higher today than ever before. If the Congress President fails, Viceroy has instructions to ask him to help Viceroy to get together a Government of representatives of Congress and other minorities. It is suggested that five seats should be left vacant and the door left open for League to come in later if they change their mind. If not, seats are to be filled up with non-League Muslims later on. The Government that will thus come into existence will—technically—still be the Viceroy's Government but Congress President will be *de facto* head of the Government and Viceroy has instructions not to interfere. I understand Panditji recently wrote to Viceroy on the subject of assurances. It is suggested that you persuade Congress to be satisfied with the letter Viceroy wrote to Maulana Saheb at Mussorie. Congress will lose nothing by doing so. It will only make things easy for the British Government. They realize the difficulty about the Viceroy but they are not in a position to do anything about it at the moment. Churchill is already giving them the maximum amount of trouble about India. They are new in office and worried about many problems.

As regards Constituent Assembly, it is requested that you persuade Congress to make a declaration reiterating Congress determination to do justice to all minorities including the biggest and Congress anxiety to secure fair deal for everybody. It is also requested that no notice be taken of Mr. Jinnah's threat and no answer given to his challenge. For the British Government has already decided to take the step that we all

desire. They ask Congress to show their natural highmindedness and magnanimity even at the risk of such magnanimity being misinterpreted as weakness. A good resolution on the long-term proposals followed by a visit to the Viceroy by the President (possibly accompanied by Sardar) will, it is suggested, meet the situation. What is essential is that Congress must now come forward and take the initiative and not leave it to the British.

I know you will read this message in the way it is meant.

Love to all from

SUDHIR

After examining my message in great detail the Working Committee in the course of its resolution said:

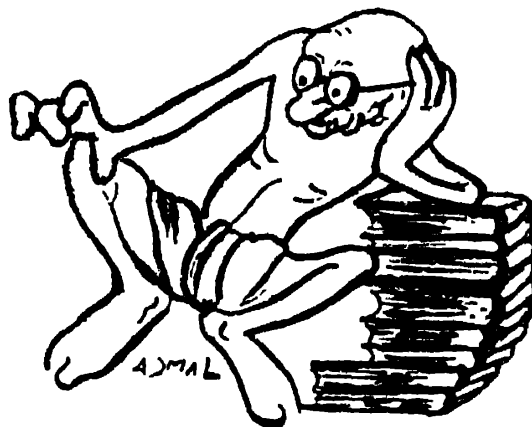
‘The Working Committee of the Congress regret to note that the Council of the All India Muslim League, reversing their previous decision, have decided not to participate in the Constituent Assembly. . . . The Committee further note that criticisms have been advanced on behalf of the Muslim League to the effect that the Congress acceptance of the proposals contained in the Statement of May 16 was conditional. The Committee wish to make it clear that, while they did not approve of all the proposals contained in this statement, they accepted the scheme in its entirety. They interpreted it so as to resolve the inconsistencies contained in it and fill the omissions in accordance with the principles laid down in the Statement. They held that provincial autonomy is a basic provision and each province has the right to decide whether to form or join a group or not. Questions of interpretation will be decided by the procedure laid down in the Statement itself, and the Congress will advise its representatives in the Constituent Assembly to function accordingly.

‘The Committee have emphasized the sovereign character of the Constituent Assembly, that is, its right to function and to draw up a constitution for India without the interference of any external power or authority, but the Assembly will naturally function within the internal limitations which are inherent in its task, and will further seek the largest co-operation in drawing up a constitution of free India, allowing the greatest measure of freedom and protection for all just claims and interests. . . . The Committee hope that the Muslim League and all others concerned in the wider interests of the nation, as well as of their own, will join in this great task.’

Under instructions from the Secretary of State the Viceroy put out, on 12th August, the announcement that he had invited the President of the Congress Party to form a provisional Government and the latter had accepted the invitation. As desired by the Secretary of State, Gandhiji did persuade Mr. Nehru to see Mr. Jinnah in Bombay. Mr. Nehru got a frosty reception but the British Government was satisfied that everything possible had been done. They therefore moved towards the formation of the Government with the Congress representatives and such other representatives of the minorities as were willing to work with the Congress, leaving it to the *de facto* Prime Minister to find means of securing the co-operation of the Muslim League. This forthright, viable and, in my opinion, disinterested decision of the Labour Government was, as I have already described in detail, undermined and bungled, in a vortex of egotism and fanaticism. It failed and that tragic failure was hastened, if not created, by Nehru's impetuosity, Wavell's ineptitude, the bigoted inertia of British bureaucrats and ruthless power tactics of the Muslim League leaders.

On 2nd October 1946, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, *Dawn*, the organ of the Muslim League, commented on me as a birthday present to Mahatma Gandhi; my meagre consolation was the cheerful verdict of friends: only the famous are lampooned.

'Mr. Gandhi is 78. The pile of non-violent literature he has produced during his fruitful political life has in turn produced such a pile of dead bodies and broken bones that we hesitate to wish him many happy returns of the fray.'



'The Great Man must have missed his Little Man on the happy occasion, having sent him on an errand to Dear Friend Attlee. But thereby hangs a tale and for the benefit of the uninitiated it had better be told from the beginning.'

\* \* \*

'One bright morning in Simla during the last conference, as we stood in front of Hotel Cecil waiting for the latest speculation, a dapper little figure sauntered up. We had a vivid impression of loose khaddar trousers, a khaddar kurta, a khaddar chaddar dangling from the neck like an inverted U, and large horn-rimmed glasses. That Khaddar had once been white.'

\* \* \*

'“Meet Mr. Sudhir Ghosh”, said a fellow journalist.

'“Ah!” said we, “a familiar name. Must be an interesting job carrying important letters to and fro?”'

'The little Great Man drew himself up to his full 5 feet 2 and said coldly: “I am capable of better things than that!” The journalist friend whispered in our ear: “You have trodden on the corns of Chota Gandhi.”'

\* \* \*

'We hastily changed the subject to the weather; but the depression had already formed and it slowly moved on towards “The Retreat”. As it passed us we thought we detected a bulky envelope bulging from the kurta-pocket.'

\* \* \*

'When later the centre of correspondence moved down to Bhangi Colony again and letters flitted to and fro between there and the Viceroy's House, the messages over-shadowed the messenger. Then one morning we read that Chota Gandhi had suddenly appeared in London.'

\* \* \*

'“The Little Great is on another errand”, we thought, and then dismissed the matter; but the greatness of the Little lies in this that they don't let you dismiss them. Chota Gandhi has crashed into Reuter with an interview.'

\* \* \*

'The Labour Party's *Herald* has also thrown some light on Mr. Gandhi's heraldic messenger, which boils down to this that after all he did carry a letter once again—a letter to Mr. Attlee, text released.'

\* \* \*

'The Great One describes the Little One as a "bridge", "a passionate lover", "an interpreter". We think we now know what he meant when he proudly told us: "I am capable of better things than that." Does not Shakespeare rank the lover, with the lunatic and the poet, among the world's unique?'

\* \* \*

'Or is it the "interpreting" that was the greater job, considering that the interpretation of the famous Paragraph 8 which Mr. Gandhi taught the Cabinet Mission, was such a complicated affair that a prompter's presence was essential lest Sir Stafford Cripps should forget his cue when back in England?'



'But we notice that what the Little One would not admit to *Dawn* he has admitted to the *Daily Herald*. He has described his function as that of an "errand boy".'

\* \* \*

'Which reminds us of the Persian proverb: "*Khar-e-Isa gar ba Makka rawad, hanuz khar bashad.*"'\*

\* \* \*

\* Translated into English it means 'The donkey of Jesus, even it goes to Mecca, still remains a donkey.'



'Our exclusive Birthday congratulations (copyright reserved) to Mr. Gandhi on possessing such a splendid errand performer. Mr. Gandhi at least can snap his fingers at postmen on strike.'

As a result of Mr. Jinnah's 'Direct Action' which started on 16th August a demoniac frenzy of murder, rape and rioting was released in Calcutta and a psychic epidemic of communal hatred spread quickly to East Bengal. In the district of Noakhali the Muslims loosed an unspeakable violence against the Hindus. Later, Hindus reciprocated on a shocking scale on the Muslim minority of Bihar. The bestiality perpetrated on the Hindus, women and children, profoundly shocked Gandhiji. He sent me off to Bengal to see Fred Burrows, the Governor of Bengal. I met the Governor and his Chief Minister in Darjeeling. Burrows, just back from an aerial visit to the Noakhali district, talked to me for nearly two hours. He explained to me in great detail with the help of a map all that he had seen of the Noakhali district from the air. Fred explained that he had reason to believe that the Chief Minister Shahid Surhawardy was not an unambiguous man, but it was impossible for him and His Majesty's Government to dismiss the Constitutional Government of the Province. He was anxious to satisfy me that he had done all that could be done by a man in his position and at the end of his long discussion asked me: 'Well, Sudhir, what would you do if you were in my shoes?' I quietly took this opportunity to be frank: 'Let us forget for a moment the Hindu-Muslim communal hatred. What has happened is a very serious breakdown of the machinery of administration of which you are the head. Since you do not feel able to take action against the Chief Minister I think you should voluntarily take the blame on yourself and resign and go home. You would thereby be acting within the British tradition of moral responsibility.' Fred was somewhat taken aback by this advice. He did not, of course, take it but when I returned to Delhi on 12th October Gandhiji agreed that that was the right and just action for the Governor. On the same day, 12th October, Gandhiji left Delhi for Noakhali in East Bengal via Calcutta. From October 1946 to March 1947 Gandhiji did his

penance in the villages of Noakhali where men had taken the lives of their brothers. He wished only to heal wounds and not to apportion blame. Over those months I was to keep in touch with Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence and to send to Gandhiji drafts of my letters to them for approval.

On 5th November 1946 I wrote to Cripps to tell him that the situation in India was getting worse every day; that the mutual slaughter of the Hindu and Muslim was inflicting permanent moral injury on India, and that the Central Government was helpless since it had no authority in the matter. We appealed to the Viceroy for action but the reply was always that communal hatred must be replaced by communal love.

I reminded Cripps of the warning given by Gandhiji in August that the Viceroy was confused in his mind after the tragedy in Calcutta; that he needed the assistance of a legal mind abler than his own and that this help should come from the British Cabinet. Gandhi's message, however, had been misunderstood and the cause of the Indian disaster was the dependence of the British Government on the Viceroy's judgement.

I made two suggestions to Cripps. Either the British Government should transfer complete power immediately to the Interim Government or, if this was not possible, the replacement of Lord Wavell by a man with a greater personality—a man skilled in what Roosevelt described as 'the science of human relationships'. To leave things as they were meant the loss by Britain of India's friendship.

Sir Stafford Cripps replied to say:

*3 Whitehall Court  
S.W.1  
12.11.46*

My dear Sudhir,

Thank you for your letter of November 5th.

I shall not answer your letters in detail as it is wiser not to do so I think but I shall regard myself as a receiver only! It is most interesting to hear your views of current events and I value these greatly.

Things are desperately difficult now in India but I believe this stage of realism has to be passed through before people will realize the practical results of co-operation and non-co-operation. It is a very different thing to co-operation and non-co-operation with the British and it reacts in completely different ways. I am sure the intelligent politicians realize the situation but not yet I fear a great many of their followers.

All good wishes.

STAFFORD CRIPPS

Just recovering from a sharp attack of shingles.

Hope to be back at work in 2 days time.

STAFFORD CRIPPS

In my work as a writer of letters to Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence I got stuck on some occasions because I did not clearly understand what Gandhiji meant and what he wanted me to say to them. This happened when I received this letter (Plate 12) from him, dated 14th November 1946, which he wrote after reading my drafts:

14.11.46

*Chiranjeev Sudhir,*

I have your two notes. You are just now more useful there than here but when you feel that you want to consult me on anything, of course you are free to come. I am fixed up in E. Bengal for some time, perhaps months, to come.

Both your letters are good as far as they go. Of course I was wholly right in what I said about the Viceroy.

Both the major parties are demoralised, each in its own way. So is the 3rd party, the British rulers. They cannot think cogently. Military glory and love of power will not allow them to do so. We see others as we are. Hence the central teaching of the Gita, acquisition of the capacity to see things with detachment as perfect as it is humanly possible.

In my opinion for the British not to leave India till there is perfect peace in the land seems to me to be an impossible dream. What they can and must do is to transfer the whole power to the willing and capable party and at the earliest moment to withdraw the British part of the army and disband

the rest. They should not think of keeping any part for the protection of British interests. These must be left to the goodwill of the people of India. This is the royal road to peaceful transfer, no other. This conviction has not yet gone home to the Cabinet. I doubt not that you can work out all the corollaries to the above. If you flounder at any point, send me your questions through a messenger.

Love to you and Shanti,

BAPU

So I decided to go to the depth of Noakhali to discuss it with him. The memory of that journey to him in the Noakhali villages was the memory of a man who was very far from everybody and everywhere. I flew from Delhi to Calcutta and then sat in a railway train for several hours to reach Goalundo, the railhead on the great Padma river; then I went down the river the whole day in a steamer and arrived at the little river-port of Chandpur; then I borrowed a jeep from the local Sub-Divisional Officer and travelled thirty miles in it; then there was another river which I crossed in a country boat to reach Ramganj and from there walked seven miles, with my suitcase on my shoulders, and late in the evening I arrived at a village called Chandipur where, according to the information given me by the villagers, Gandhiji was staying in a village dhobi's house. It was not easy to discover the washerman's house in the deep darkness of the Noakhali village in the midst of a forest of 'supari' trees; but a village boy guided me ultimately to the right place.

I presented myself to the temporary host of Gandhiji and asked him if I might see his guest. He pointed to the little hut in which a lamp was burning and gave me permission to walk in. I peeped in and there he was, all alone, working away in the light of a kerosene lamp, a hurricane lantern with a broken chimney. My footsteps disturbed him and he looked up and there was the familiar smile of greeting. 'Ah, there you are', he said, 'I was wondering when you would arrive.' So I dumped my suitcase and sat down on a corner of his hard wooden board ('*Taktaposh*', as they call it in Bengali).

The first thing I said was that I had brought with me letters from Panditji and the Sardar. But, instead of talking about the letters or what was happening in Delhi in the matter of transfer of power from one great country to another, the first question he asked me was who carried my suitcase all these miles. I said I had carried it on my own shoulders. It pleased him to know that I had carried it myself instead of getting some villager to carry it for me. Then he asked me many detailed questions about my journey from Calcutta to Goalundo and from Goalundo to Chandpur in the river steamer and the food I had on the steamer, and how I travelled the thirty miles from Chandpur to Ramganj and how I crossed the river and how much difficulty I had in finding the village of Chandipur.

The next question I was not prepared for, and I found myself very much in the wrong. It was, 'Have you brought your mosquito net?' I had to admit that I had not. So he went for me. 'You were born in Bengal; don't you know that it is impossible to sleep in these Noakhali villages without a mosquito net?' His grand-niece, Manu Gandhi, the only person left with him to cook his food and look after him—all the others he had sent away—intervened at this stage. She had overheard the conversation and peeped in to say that there was a spare mosquito net with her which she could lend me.

After settling the question of a mosquito net he asked Manu if she had kept any food for me. To this I protested that I had had some food on the steamer and I did not want any. It was embarrassing to see the frail old man who had deprived himself even of the simple food he was accustomed to bothering about my food and my sleeping arrangements. But he would not listen. So I quickly swallowed the food which poor Manu had put together on a plate for me.

Then he seemed to be at ease and started talking about big people and big things. 'Well, have you been seeing the lions? Were they nice to you? Did you say you had brought some letters from them?' he asked in quick succession. 'The lions'—that was the special name he often used in conversation with me to refer jokingly to the two great men who later became the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister of India.

'Oh yes, they were very nice to me, but, as you know, I am a little scared of the No. 1 lion; I have to be careful with him; to the deputy lion I can say anything I like and get away with it,' I observed. This amused him and he laughed. It was good to see him laughing, sitting in the dim light of a kerosene lamp in the dhobi's house.

After the laughter I produced the two letters and he asked me to open them and read them out to him. He listened quietly. When I finished he looked very grave and he became silent. When the silence ended, he said as if he was talking to himself. 'So they want me to go back to Delhi, do they?' 'Yes', I said. 'They have to take big and difficult decisions about the future of the country, and how can they take those decisions without you?' He pondered over all this for quite some time and very slowly said, 'No, my place is here, I will stay here.'

He then talked about the work for which he had summoned me from Delhi. At the instance of Sir Stafford Cripps I had undertaken to write a series of long letters to him during those critical months—from September 1946 when the Congress Party formed the Interim Government to February 1947 when the Labour Government in Britain decided to appoint a new Viceroy—to interpret Gandhiji to him and to Lord Pethick-Lawrence. I had sent Gandhiji the draft of two long letters to Sir Stafford and Lord Pethick-Lawrence, and Gandhiji had written to me to comment on them. But I floundered, and I was not sure that I fully understood him. So he had summoned me to discuss those drafts with him and made his corrections and explained what I should say to Sir Stafford. Before he went to sleep he asked me to stay with him for a few days.

As there was no other visitor, we had ample time together. I walked with him from village to village. He had discarded even his leather sandals and walked bare-footed and did not stop for more than one night in one village. He slept in any hut where the villagers gave him shelter. He ate whatever food they gave him. His usual companions were not anywhere near him—not even the faithful Pyarelal. Only the young grand-niece, Manu, and a Bengali interpreter travelled with him. As I

walked with him for those few days I found his meetings with the villagers very moving. The villagers were not like the crowds of the cities who came to see him often out of curiosity. The villagers' response to him reminded one of the Lord Buddha on his pilgrimage, walking from village to village, with his stick in his hand, preaching the gospel of tolerance and compassion.

At one point, as I was walking with him, an old woman was waiting for him by the roadside. She said, 'My son, I am a blind woman. I cannot see you. I want to touch you.' Gandhiji touched the old woman's head and said something to her and she cried. As I visited village after village with Gandhiji I saw hundreds of burnt homesteads and heard the same story of brother taking brother's life. His only concern was to heal the wounds—not to apportion blame.

He had a habit, as is well known, of leaning on someone's shoulder while walking, using the person as his 'stick'. For those few days he used me as his 'stick' and as he walked, leaning on my shoulders, he talked at great length about his loneliness. He explained how even his own colleagues did not fully appreciate what he was trying to do in East Bengal and would be glad to see him back in Delhi or Sevagram. But his heart was in the villages of East Bengal. In a way he was happy because he was doing what he really wanted to do.

The Bengal Government was not at all pleased with his presence in East Bengal; it felt that his presence was attracting world-wide attention to its misdeeds. But he felt that what he was doing there was really simple—to restore confidence in men and women who were afraid and to persuade Hindus and Muslims to live together as good neighbours. In his inner life he was making a great experiment with himself once again. The value of his effort was not to be judged, he thought, merely by the results produced in Noakhali.

During these talks, which were more whispers than talks (physically he was very weak), he surveyed the whole Indian scene, his work to free India from foreign rule, the great organization which he had built up and the great men who were his creations. At the end of this long journey he had reached a

point where he felt he was alone. None of his life-long colleagues was with him. He saw the division of his beloved India into two States coming. The anticipation of it tormented him. In a voice that broke one's heart he said, at the end of his long survey 'Don't you see the loneliness of it all?'



## CHAPTER NINE

### *Gandhi, The Father*

**D**URING MY travels in various parts of the world—North and South America, Europe and Asia—I have often been asked: ‘What is the clue to the great power that Gandhi had over other men and women?’ My answer is that it originated in his incredible capacity to care for others. You were taken up by him because nobody cared for you the way he did. He did not love mankind only. He loved you as an individual and quickened to your singular sorrows, your particular happinesses. He always had time for you; he was never too busy to see you or to think about you if you were away. How one man could find room for so many in his mind and heart was a miracle.

He was not a President or a Prime Minister; he had no Army, Navy, Air Force or Government to enforce his will; yet millions of men and women obeyed him. If he said he was not going to have his food for a number of days because a section of his people had done some grave wrong to another, the country was immediately thrown into a convulsion. He was the father who cared for you and that’s why it hurt when he went without his food. He was not a remote heavenly father, but very much of an earthly father with whom you could argue and disagree. Even if you got yourself into serious trouble as a result of direct disobedience to his advice, he cared so deeply that he was incapable of saying: ‘I told you so.’ I had one such extraordinary experience and the story of it is worth telling.

By December 1946 it became quite clear that there was no way of putting an end to the battle that was raging between the Congress and the Muslim League. Both were in the provisional Government and were malfunctioning as two blocks ranged against each other. The 9th December had been fixed for

convening the Constituent Assembly; but there was no move from the Muslim League to enter it and to co-operate with the rest of India in framing a constitution. The Muslim League had not rescinded its Bombay resolution withdrawing its acceptance of the British Plan for constitution-making. The logic of this refusal was self-exclusion from the Interim Government. But, by stubborn illogic, the League was very much in the Government. Mr. Jinnah claimed that the Congress had not accepted the plan for constitution-making either. He claimed that Congress had mental reservations with regard to the proposed grouping of Assam-Bengal and Punjab-NWFP-Baluchistan-Sind. It was clear that the whole Indian situation had gone back roughly to where it had been before the Cabinet Mission came out to India in March 1946. The main issue once again was 'Pakistan or undivided India'.

In this situation the British Labour Government decided to make one more effort in the first week of December to bring together the leaders of the dead-locked parties in London. Mr. Nehru at first refused to go to London but was persuaded by a personal message from Mr. Attlee. On 2nd December Mr. Nehru, Sardar Baldev Singh, Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan reached London. The London Conference, of course, failed to produce an agreement. On 6th December the Labour Government issued a statement in which they reaffirmed their view on the question of grouping of provinces and asked the Congress to accept the British view in order to open the way for the Muslim League to come into the Constituent Assembly. The British Government agreed, however, that if, in spite of their re-affirmation, the Constituent Assembly desired that this fundamental point should be referred for interpretation to the Federal Court of India, it could be done and should be done at an early date and the meetings of sections of the Constituent Assembly consisting of the two groups of provinces should be postponed until after the Federal Court had given its verdict. The Congress Working Committee declared on 22nd December that there was no point in referring the issue to the Federal Court if the other parties did not agree to such reference or to accept the Court's verdict; they reiterated their position that the

British Government's interpretation on voting in sections of the Assembly was repugnant to the fundamental question of the autonomy of a province, which the Cabinet Mission had conceded in their scheme. It all boiled down to what Gandhiji had said to me in his letter of 14th November 1946 (which I had conveyed to Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence): 'In my opinion for the British Government not to leave India till there is perfect peace in the land seems to me to be an impossible dream. What they can and must do is to transfer the whole power to the willing and capable party and at the earliest moment to withdraw the British part of the army and disband the rest. This is *the* royal road to peaceful transfer and no other. This conviction has not yet gone home to the Cabinet.'

Indeed the Labour Government did not accept this view. It decided instead to give the Indian leaders, of both parties, a shock treatment. On 20.2.1947 Mr. Attlee announced in the House of Commons that the British Government was determined to hand over power to Indian hands by June 1948. Whether there was agreement between the two major parties or not. Failing agreement the British Government would be prepared to hand over power, if need be, in bits and pieces, to the provinces and to the States and they would have to reconsider to whom the powers of the existing Central Government should be transferred, 'whether as a whole to some kind of Central Government of British India or in some areas to the existing provincial Governments or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people.' In the same statement Mr. Attlee announced that Lord Mountbatten was to succeed Lord Wavell as Viceroy of India.

At this stage Vallabhbhai Patel decided that in the ensuing and critical months it would be helpful to have me in London. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which was one of his portfolios, was planning to appoint a Public Relations Officer at the Indian High Commission in London. Vallabhbhai Patel asked me to take this job. I told him that I liked the idea but I could not take such a position without the approval of Gandhiji. He agreed that I should go to the interior of Noakhali in East Bengal where Gandhiji was walking from village to

village to give the victims of communal violence whatever comfort his presence meant to them. When I reached this remote and obscure village and placed before him Vallabhbhai's proposal he immediately said, 'Krishna Menon is already there. He is Jawaharlal's man in London. Why do you want to go there? No. I don't feel happy about this proposal. I feel that you will find yourself in trouble there. And I shall be worried about you. I don't want you to be in trouble. You see Vallabhbhai is a very powerful man; he revels in opposition. He does not understand that other people cannot cope with troubles as he can. No. I don't feel happy about it. But talk it over with Vallabhbhai again. Have a talk with Jawaharlal too. And do what they think best.'

On my return to New Delhi I repeated Gandhiji's comments to Vallabhbhai. He said: 'I don't understand all this. What has Krishna Menon got to do with it? Krishna Menon has nothing to do with the Government of India. He is a private individual. He runs the India League. What has he got to do with the Indian High Commissioner's Office? It is possible that Menon may be jealous of the fact that you have access to men in power like Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence and that you enjoy their confidence. It would be wise to keep out of his way. But you are going there as a Government official. What can Krishna Menon do to you? Bapu does not understand these things; he does not have to run a Government. I think you had better go to London. We don't know what sort of a person this new man, Mountbatten, is. It would be useful for us to be in direct touch with Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence.'

After having decided that I should go to London Vallabhbhai came up against some unexpected difficulty. He received a letter from the Viceroy Lord Wavell objecting to my appointment. The Viceroy expressed the view that I was much too identified with the Congress Party and could not properly represent the views of the Government of India as a whole. Being the strong man he was, Vallabhbhai wrote back firmly to say that it was not a question of the appointment of an Ambassador representing India in London. It was a minor appointment of a Public Relations Officer, a Cambridge

graduate with a good degree and with a background of public affairs was invaluable for such a post. As Minister in charge of Information and Broadcasting, he was unable to accept the Viceroy's advice in this instance. Vallabhbhai did not have the faintest notion at that time that in less than six months' time Krishna Menon was going to be the High Commissioner for India in London. Had he known he would never have sent me. I liked the challenge of the job and decided to accept it and informed Gandhiji about my decision.

My wife and I left New Delhi by air for London on 1st March. As we got into the car to go to the Palam airport a telegram arrived. It said: 'God be with you. Bapu.'

Before leaving New Delhi I went to see Mr. Nehru. In those days he was always accessible to me. When I explained to him that Vallabhbhai had decided to send me to London he did not sound particularly enthusiastic. He solemnly said: 'I suppose you will be seeing a great deal of Stafford Cripps?' I said I did intend to keep in close touch with him. Thereupon he remarked: 'Well, the more you see him the less you know him.' I thought it was a curious remark to make about a man like Stafford Cripps. Anticipating difficulties from Krishna Menon, about which Gandhiji seemed to have a premonition, I asked Mr. Nehru if he would give me a letter of introduction to him. He did so. The letter, curt and coolish, said that I was being sent to London by Vallabhbhai Patel (I suppose he wanted to make it clear that he had nothing to do with it) to take over from the Secretary of State's office the department of Indian Information; he was not sure about my qualifications for this type of work; he had, however, asked me to keep in touch with Krishna Menon.

It seemed to me more a letter of admonition than of introduction, but in due course I presented it to Krishna Menon.

I also carried with me a letter from Vallabhbhai Patel to Cripps. Among other things, Vallabhbhai wrote at some length about the serious difficulties created for the Congress Party leaders by Prime Minister Attlee's announcement in the House of Commons on 20th February, 1947 that whether there was any agreement amongst the Indian parties or not the British

Government had made up its mind to quit India by June 1948 and were prepared, if need be, to hand over power separately to the Indian provinces and to the Princely States.

Sir Stafford's response to this letter was wide-ranging and frank. I wrote of it to Vallabhbhai Patel:

*India House  
London W.C.2  
14th March 1947*

My dear Sardar,

I am sorry that I have been so long in writing to you. But I wanted to wait till I was sure that I knew the mind of people at this end. I have now seen all the three people concerned with Indian affairs, i.e. Cripps, Attlee and Pethick-Lawrence, and I am now in a position to give you an appraisal of the situation.

I will first tell you about Cripps who is the pivot in the set-up here in so far as India is concerned. I saw him within a few hours of my arrival here on the 3rd March and I battled with him for two long hours after dinner till 11 o'clock. I told him that when the February 20th statement was issued Panditji picked out only the positive parts of it and said something which was above politics and gave it a warm welcome, but there were things in the statement which were extremely vague and obscure and had increased the difficulties of the Congress leaders in their dealings with the States and the Muslim League. He very emphatically said that if the States imagined that the British Government would be prepared to negotiate with them directly and they were likely to get a little more from the British than from the Indian Constituent Assembly, then they were a lot of lunatics. I pointed out to him that there was no inducement at all in the statement either to the Muslim League or to the Indian States to be more co-operative; on the other hand the indication that the British government would be prepared to hand over power to the Provincial governments in the event of the Indians failing to agree among themselves has naturally given the Muslims the impression that if they sat quiet and non-co-operated till June 1948 then the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal, the Punjab and Sind would be

automatically separated from the rest of India and they would be in a position to work out some kind of Pakistan. I mentioned to him that even if the British government was prepared to hand over power in that very untidy manner to the Provinces and to the States it would not be possible for them to hand over the whole of Bengal and the whole of the Punjab to the Muslim League; for there was already a strong movement in Bengal amongst the Hindus for the partition of the province and that the same demand would be made by the Sikhs and the Hindus in Eastern Punjab. He made it perfectly clear that the British government would never agree to any partitioning of provinces before they leave; they feel that it is none of their business and if the Indians wish to revise provincial boundaries it is for them to arrange it amongst themselves. 'The process cannot go on *ad infinitum*; you must stop somewhere and the Province is the limit. It is absurd to talk about handing over power to parts of provinces,' he remarked. He however went on to say that he was sure that Mr. Jinnah and his colleagues were furiously wondering whether their insistence on Pakistan was going to lead them anywhere; the Pakistan they are likely to get would be very different from what they wanted and it may not be worth their while. I said I hoped that it would be possible for him and his colleagues to say something in the course of the debate in the House of Commons which would make it obvious that the British government was not going to do anything to encourage disruption in India. He laughed and said: 'What you really want, my dear Sudhir, is that we should be partial to the Congress and enable them to coerce the Muslim League. This we cannot do. We are determined to be impartial. Congress must win the co-operation of the Muslims.' I explained to him that there was no question of anybody wanting the British government to be partial to the Congress. We fully realize that the majority party has to win the co-operation of the minority party and all that was suggested was that nothing should be said which put a premium on non-co-operation. He, however, does not see the point and, as you now know, they all stuck to the line of what they consider 'impartiality'. On the evening of the Debate Lord Pethick-Lawrence called a meeting

of the Labour M.P.s and explained to them the importance of everybody being absolutely impartial in their speeches; he sincerely believes that any impression given to the Muslim League that the Labour Government is in any way aligning itself with the Indian majority would spoil the chances of an agreement.

I asked Sir Stafford what exactly he meant when he said that Congress must win the co-operation of the Muslim League and what he had in his mind came out. It is clear to me that Cripps and his colleagues have always fostered a grievance in their minds against the Congress leaders that they trifled with the British Plan as set out in the statement of May 16th. They are all convinced that the origin of our present serious difficulties in India is the public statement made by Panditji in July last at Bombay when he said, according to them, that Congress acceptance of the British plan meant no commitment on the part of Congress and that Congress was free to do what it liked with the British plan. This is a sore point with them and they just cannot get over it. All of them—particularly Cripps—have a deep feeling about it. They think that this one event changed the whole course of our affairs. It is no use arguing with them about it. Then I asked him if he would plainly tell me what they now wanted Congress to do. What they really want (and here Cripps, Attlee and Pethick-Lawrence are all united) is that Congress should now by way of a supreme effort remove the doubts and suspicions in the Muslim mind, tell the world quite bluntly and in detail what they really mean when they say they accepted the British interpretation of the Cabinet Mission's plan as set out in the statement of December 6th. You will remember that some time ago Liaquat Ali Khan asked in a public statement a number of detailed questions as to what the Congress meant by accepting the British interpretation. Cripps thinks Liaquat Ali did it clumsily but what the British Government really want is a detailed answer by Congress to these questions in a dignified form. If Congress is prepared to do this before the arrival of the new Viceroy the British government would be in a position to do the rest.

I have carefully examined what Attlee, Cripps and



Pethick-Lawrence had to say to me. They do not believe that it will be necessary for them to transfer power in bits in an untidy manner; nor are they interested to do so. They think that the intelligent mind of Mr. Jinnah will soon realize that the Pakistan he is likely to get is not worth anything; if on top of this realization in Mr. Jinnah's mind Congress is in a position to say in detail what is meant by its acceptance of the British interpretation of the plan, then it will be possible for them to give Mountbatten such instructions and directives as would enable him to get the Muslim League into the Constituent Assembly.

I also raised the question of their agreeing to treat the Interim Government as a Dominion Government and I discussed the brief draft showing how the present Government can be converted into a Dominion Government which V. P. Menon gave me the day I left New Delhi.\* Cripps firmly rejected the proposition. Pethick-Lawrence is examining it carefully. I am afraid they will never agree to treat the Government now as a Dominion government and to treat Panditji as de facto Prime Minister of it. Their argument is that they are going in July 1948 and that India is going to be fully independent after this brief period and, in view of that, why should the British take the responsibility of handing over power to the Indian majority? If they treat the Government as a Dominion government it means handing over real and full power to the Congress and the Indian majority; this they are not prepared to do. The Muslim League has always resisted it and the British government think that this would be unjust to the Muslims and they would be wrong in doing it. In any case it is not their business, they feel, to make any temporary arrangement for the period between now and June 1948. But if Congress is prepared to accept the British interpretation of the May 16th statement in detail, as desired by the British government, it will be possible for the British government to give such advice to the new Viceroy as will enable him to make the Interim Government a real Cabinet and a team that works.

\* Mr. V. P. Menon refers to it in his book *Transfer of Power in India* (p. 359) by saying that he had sent this plan to the Secretary of State by a 'special messenger'.

This does not mean that they will be prepared to ask Panditji to form a government as they did last August. They were particularly cautious about discussing the directives they are giving to the new Viceroy. But it is not impossible that the new Viceroy will ask for the resignation of all the members of the Government and then reform the government; when the Muslims are invited to rejoin the government they do so on the understanding that the government is to function as a Cabinet and not two lots of people who work against each other. The Viceroy is to remain his own Prime Minister but they believe that the relations between the new Viceroy and Panditji is bound to be so cordial that they think it highly unlikely that there will be any difficulty at any time. As far as I can understand their mind they will give the new Viceroy a large measure of freedom to make his own decision in this matter.

I pointed out to Cripps that acceptance of the British interpretation in the way they want really means that Assam must be handed over to Bengal and the Bengalis should be left free to do what they like with the Constitution of Assam. Their answer is that the right thing to do is not to assume that the Bengal representatives in section C. are a gang of tricksters and to leave it to them to do justice or injustice to Assam. What happens if injustice is done is a thing to be decided at the time and it is essential not to talk in advance about what will happen in the event of Bengal representatives doing injustice to Assam. Here they blame Bapu for all the difficulties that have arisen.

What I have said above will give you some indication of what is to be expected from the new Viceroy. If a policy of unqualified friendship towards him is pursued by our people there is nothing to be lost and a great deal may be gained. I will write again.

My life here is a continuous series of interviews. My coming here seems to have aroused a great deal of interest and I have been spending most of my time seeing a steady stream of visitors. I have also established contacts with most of the newspaper editors. You may have seen the recent Leader in *The Times* which was rather helpful. I shall soon be able to get together my little office and take over the work from Joyce. I have had a

long talk with Joyce and spoke to the Secretary of State about it when I saw him.

Love from us,

SUDHIR

Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy-designate, left London on 20th March and arrived in New Delhi on 22nd March. On 19th March I had an unexpected meeting with the Viceroy-designate, who was being briefed by the Secretary of State's office. I was asked by Captain Lascelles, the private secretary to Lord Mountbatten, to have a talk with the Viceroy-designate before he left for India. Although I had never had the privilege of meeting Lord Mountbatten before, he received me as if I were an old friend. He explained that he had heard from the Secretary of State and from Sir Stafford Cripps much about me and my relationship with Mr. Gandhi. Thereupon he started to unroll before me his plan of action in India. He talked for nearly an hour reviewing all that he had heard about the Indian situation and naming the people he was going to meet upon his arrival in India and in what order. I could not help wondering why he was speaking to me with such candour. Very soon it became clear. At the end of his lengthy discussion he said, 'Well my friend, in the process of transferring power to your people there is bound to be bloodshed.' He then added: 'However, there is something that I would like you to do for me. As soon as possible after my arrival in New Delhi, I must meet Mr. Gandhi. I want to meet him before I meet anybody else. But I gather from the Secretary of State that he is far away from New Delhi—somewhere in the interior of Bihar where there was a lot of communal violence—and that he refuses to come to New Delhi. I hear that even Mr. Nehru could not persuade him to come to New Delhi. But I must see Mr. Gandhi. So will you please write a letter to him tonight and have it delivered tomorrow morning at 8 at my house at 16 Belgrave Square, just behind Buckingham Palace? Soon after 8 I fly off to India. Give Mr. Gandhi an account of what I have told you and do everything in your power to persuade him to come to New Delhi to see me.'

Lord Wavell would have considered it unthinkable for the Viceroy of India to ask a man of my position to give him what was in effect a letter of introduction to Mr. Gandhi. But the new Viceroy was shrewd enough to know that for the purpose of getting Mr. Gandhi to come and see him in New Delhi he certainly had found the likely man.

That evening my wife and I had been invited to dinner by Arthur Bottomley, Woodrow Wyatt and some of the young Labour M.P.s in the restaurant of the House of Commons. So I walked from Whitehall to Westminster Palace to join them. I told them that I had been asked to write a letter to Mahatma Gandhi for the new Viceroy and I wanted some paper on which I could compose a letter. The only paper they could give me was the note-paper used by M.P.s at the head of which is embossed 'House of Commons, London'. So I wrote my letter on that note-paper and had it duly delivered next morning at 16 Belgrave Square. In due course a reply came from the Mahatma which said:

*Patna*

*21.4.47*

*Chiranjeev* Sudhir and Shanti (Sudhir and Shanti, may they live long)

I have had all your letters. The work in front of me leaves me little room for correspondence that is not absolutely necessary. I have little to say to you. I have to listen to what you may have to say. You must have seen all I had to do with the Viceroy. We have come to like one another. Events will show of what he is made. He is certainly working hard as behoves a naval man.

Both of you are on your trial there. I have no doubt you will come out well through the ordeal. How is Shanti keeping in health? What is she learning there?

My work is very difficult. I have no business to grumble. When I approached it, I knew the difficulty. I suppose you are getting some Indian papers. Give my love to Agatha and other friends. I do hope Carl Heath's health is better.

Love to you both.

BAPU

The letter was written evidently by some young girl with immature hand-writing and at the end there were two lines written by Gandhiji in his own hand: 'This is a copy of the letter that was posted to you yesterday stupidly to the wrong address. Not wishing to run the risk of delay I had the text copied out. The original was written in my own hand.' In the midst of all his sorrows and loneliness he was anxious to assure me that he did write to me in his own hand; he thought I might feel hurt if I got the impression that the father did not care to write to me in his own hand and had dictated a letter to me. That was the measure of his capacity to care.

Later the original letter addressed to 'Sudhir Ghosh, House of Commons, London' also came; the British Post Office was so clever that they found out my address and duly delivered the letter at our flat in Kensington.

So far so good. But within a short time my troubles started. Bapu's premonitions took shape. I received a letter from Mr. Nehru marked 'Personal', dated 6th April 1947, in which he said:

*17 York Road  
New Delhi, India  
6 April, 1947*

My dear Sudhir,

I was rather taken aback by the announcement in the press of the formation of the Friends of India Committee in London. The formation of such a committee is, of course, good. But I am doubtful of the advantage of officially sponsoring such a committee. Even the Congress avoided doing this because it felt that the value of such a committee is lessened by official backing. This applies much more so to the Government of India. The move may be misinterpreted and called a party move.

2. I spoke about this matter to Sardar Patel, and I am writing to Vellodi also. I do not suggest that what has been done should be undone. That would be difficult and might have undesirable consequences. But I do want you and others concerned to proceed very cautiously in this and other like matters.

3. So far as the personnel of the committee is concerned, it appears to be good and the idea of their meeting is also good. It is this official sponsoring that I do not like and I do not want any step you might take on behalf of the Government of India to be considered a party step or a step which gives rise to criticism among Indians in London or elsewhere. We are passing through a delicate and difficult phase of our existence and we have to be careful as to what we should do and how we should do it.

Yours sincerely,

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

*Shri Sudhir Ghosh,  
India House,  
London.*

What had happened was that I had gathered together a group calling itself British Friends of India. Headed by H. N. Brailsford, an old friend of Mr. Nehru, the group set out to explain to the British people, some of India's problems and difficulties. It had nothing to do with the Government of India. Although I had taken the initiative there was nothing official about it. It was obvious to me that such a group of eminent Britons could speak with immediate effect to the British public about India and could immensely reinforce the work done by the paid officials of the Indian Government. H. N. Brailsford tried to explain what it was all about in this letter:

*37 Belsize Park Gardens,  
London, N.W.3  
26th May, 1947*

My dear Jawaharlal,

This goes to you with warm and affectionate greetings from my wife and myself. We think of you constantly during these difficult and strenuous days, and wish for you strength and serenity of mind. Have you I wonder been able to snatch a moment of rest among the mountains?

I would like to tell you how our new group, the Friends of India, is progressing. You will realize that our aim is to include

in it Englishmen of all parties who have a friendly interest in India and wish to promote a close and equal relationship in the new era of independence. Its membership will be solely British. I stress that, because some Indians in London misunderstood its purpose and saw in it a possible rival to the India League. Its aims and composition are wholly different. It is drawn from all parties though of course our few Tories are those who genuinely accept independence. The active members, so far, are Sir Stanley Reed, Sir George Schuster, Leonard Elmhirst, Woodrow Wyatt and myself. But others have joined one or other of our discussions—e.g. Lord Beveridge, Sir Harold Nicolson, and Graham White. R. A. Butler spoke at our first gathering. Sudhir Ghosh has acted throughout as liaison man and has won from all of us golden opinions. You could not, if I may say so, have chosen a more acceptable or popular public relations officer. He is enterprising and imaginative and I'm sure that as the months go on, his work will bear fruit in the growth of a more friendly and better-informed public opinion. Our group is discussing what lines of action—cultural and economic as well as political—it shall take up. I have in mind an early public discussion of the Sterling balances questions, at which an Indian speaker might state your case, which hasn't reached even the friendly public as yet. But we have to choose our moment and don't know yet what decision we shall take. It's obvious that we can gather round the group a big and influential body of 'friends'.

If, as I fear, the idea of a federal Indian Union has to be abandoned for the present, is it too soon to substitute for it the idea of a Confederation? This seems to me to offer the only hope of preserving the national army intact. The old Dual Monarchy might serve as a model. Austria and Hungary were sovereign, independent States, but they had a common army. Delegations (on a footing of parity) met annually to vote supplies. There were three common ministers—Foreign Affairs, Defence and Finance.

The system worked (though with some friction) because the Habsburg Crown served as the common link. Also the two realms had a Customs Union.

If Hindustan and Pakistan could be linked in this way, they would have to choose a President of the Confederation.

Conceivably Burma and Ceylon might eventually come in.

But I can imagine how anxiously you and your colleagues are turning over possible devices, and you may discover something better than this.

My wife joins me in sending our love to you and Indira and your grandchild.

Yours ever,

NOEL BRAILSFORD

But it was no use. The trouble increased as the following two letters, one from Mr. Nehru and the other from Vallabhbhai Patel, to me would indicate.

*New Delhi*

*20th June, 1947*

My dear Sudhir,

I sent you a brief note in answer to your letter some days ago. Almost immediately after that Sardar Patel sent me a copy of your letter to him, dated 28th May. I have read this and have had a talk also with Sardar Patel. He will no doubt write to you separately, but I think I owe it to you to write frankly what I feel about this matter.

First of all one thing should be clear to everybody that for anyone to say that you represent Sardar Patel in London and that somebody else represents me is fantastic nonsense; further that Sardar Patel and I are carrying on different policies of Government is equally silly. We differ in some matters, as intelligent people differ but we work in the closest cooperation, not only because of our long association and regard for each other but also because the situation demands it. You represent in London no individual minister or any other person but the Government of India as such and naturally you have to function in accordance with the rules laid down by the Government for that purpose.

Government routine work sometimes descends to the level of playing about with red tape. This is rightly criticized. Nevertheless, there is a value in sticking to certain routine



and discipline in any organization. For this reason, it is necessary to function through the usual channels. Otherwise there is confusion and misunderstanding. In London your superior authority is naturally the High Commissioner and you should go to him for his advice and consult him in any worthwhile matter. He is not only your superior officer but is a man of far greater experience of life and of work in London and his advice is likely to be correct. This does not preclude you from dealing directly with the department of the Government of India with which you are specially connected, that is the Information & Broadcasting Department.

So much for the official side. There is also the personal aspect of this as of other matters. It appears from your letter as from some other accounts that you had some difficulty in London and certain controversies have arisen about you. I am not surprised to learn this, because one has always to step warily in a new place and endeavour to obtain the goodwill of one's colleagues; otherwise certain suspicion arises. Politics in India are confused, or apparently so, and the situation changes from day to day. It is difficult for officials of the Government to know always what is exactly happening and what policy should be pursued. With the coming of a new government they would naturally not know whether this indicated any change in policy or not.

Then again, London is a hot-bed of intrigue. The Indians there have a host of organizations existing mostly on paper. There are naturally all kinds of persons amongst our countrymen in England. There is excellent material there and there are also some persons who are totally undesirable. For the rest people float about on the surface having nothing better to do than to criticize others. A new-comer has to face all these surroundings. If he is at all aggressive or expansive in his methods he will raise opposition.

You have referred in your letter to Krishna Menon and his lieutenants in London: also, to the India League, I happen to know a good deal about both Krishna Menon and his work in London as well as about the India League. Personally I have a high regard for Krishna Menon and his work and consider

मैं निकल बागें में हूँ। दुनिया को  
 ओका जाला कहते हैं। और सबेरी  
 दुकली कहते हैं। उमर उमर  
 कहो जाऊँ? गुलाब पर मैं रोना निक  
 हूँ। मैं मानना हूँ कि गुलाब। बीजे  
 पर बिस्वाक जिंदा बिस्वाक हूँ।  
 दुखी बालिका और सुखी बालिका  
 हैं।

8. A brief note by Gandhi written in Hindi, on his day of silence, instructing the author to convey to the Cabinet Mission his mental difficulty in pursuing the negotiations further in Simla

Telephone No. WHITEHALL 5110

in reply to this communication  
it quote the following reference

Your Ref



BOARD OF TRADE.

MILLBANK.

LONDON, S.W.1

BY AIR MAIL

27.1.47

My Dear Brother,

I have your letter and I think  
the topic of it is impeccable!

At the moment we are - and have  
been - wholly absorbed in the ~~ethnical~~  
of the Burman affair which we have  
just brought to what I hope will be  
a happy conclusion. We were all very  
much impressed by Aung San.

We shall be reviewing the Indian  
situation very shortly and I shall have  
in mind the two suggestions I made  
to Pannabhai and I hope they may  
materialise before too long. The suggestion  
of Runggi we shall certainly consider

9. Letter from Sir Stafford Cripps to the author, dated 27th January 1947, indicating for the first time that Lord Wavell was to be replaced by Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy (2 pages)

by very kindest regards and all affectionate  
thoughts to Taurina's? Vallabhai Rajee?  
Rajendra Narad the old man + all!

as we always thank considerations  
coming from that very kind and  
helpful quarter. You can be assured  
that I will see that full attention  
is paid to them and please thank  
Rajaji very much for sending them  
along.

I am so glad Isabel was able  
to help - as you know I have  
a very high opinion of her and I  
should find it difficult to get on  
without her help and advice!

We shall await with interest  
Tina's next steps on the 25th  
but I don't anticipate that it is  
likely to be decisive. Then we shall  
have to make up our minds as  
to what we do.

All fond wishes  
Rajendra Giffys

Minister have been contacted and

suggested that you too should be  
present if they don't mind. Hatched  
pain from them -

10. A brief note by Gandhi written on his day of silence, 24th June 1946, instructing the author to arrange with the Cabinet Mission that the author should be present at a crucial meeting that day, which led to the acceptance by the Congress Party of the Cabinet Mission's proposal for constitution-making, which was about to be rejected

I understand  
from Sudhir  
something quite  
different  
understood  
that you  
proposed  
to see up the  
whole thing

①

of imperious  
Government  
as it has  
some one who  
will consider  
the situation  
in 1946

①A

Then if you  
say that you  
will form a  
Government  
out of the  
assembled  
it is not what  
as far as can  
be. If you  
are not sure  
deserve to carry  
if you would

②

discuss the  
thing with me  
would gladly  
do so after  
the opening  
of the session  
after 8 p.m.  
meanwhile  
you should have  
if you don't  
mind the out-  
letter of rejection

③

11. Twelve other brief notes containing Gandhi's written remarks, on his day of silence, 24 June 1946, in the course of crucial discussion with the Cabinet Mission (3 pages)

3  
of the proposal  
contained in  
the Viceroy's  
letter of 2nd  
inst. in  
my opinion  
that letter is  
a new approach  
on the side of  
the mission which  
resents the step

2.1.12

of the WC so  
far as I know  
to help the  
mission in  
to handle it  
which when  
to produce  
substantive  
the WC committee  
decide. I shall  
write to you

4  
brought light  
through the  
prevailing  
darkness. But  
is there really  
light? ✓

As to the work  
I went to work  
I was quite  
clear up to  
yesterday after

noon that  
the long-expected  
work the  
committee  
assembly to  
the best of its  
ability. But  
the rules I read  
yesterday have  
revolutionized  
my mentality.  
There is a

serious place  
 reached the head  
 of the river  
 and the  
 water was  
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MS. V. 161

8

when you  
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9

MS. V. 161

when you  
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 and the  
 water was  
 very deep

11

MS. V. 161



18-11-46

12/11/46

I have your two notes you are just now more useful than when here. When you feel that you want to consult me on anything, of course you are free to come. I am fixed up in Bengal for some time, perhaps months to come.

From your letters are just as far as they go. Of course I was wholly right in what I had said about the viceroys. Both the major parties are demoralised even in their own way so is the 3rd party. The British rulers. They cannot think capably military glory & love of power.

will not allow them to do so. We are other as we are. Hence the central teaching of the Gide, signature of the capacity to see things with detachment as perfect as it is humanly possible.

In my opinion for the British not to leave India all there is perfect peace in the land & seems to me to be an impossible dream what they can not must do is to transfer the whole burden to the willing & capable party and at the earliest moment to withdraw the British party the army & disband the rest.

they should not think of keeping any part for the protection of British interests. These must be left to the goodwill of the people of India. This is the royal road to peaceful transfer no other. This union has not yet gone home to the cabinet. I don't think that you can work out all the complications in the above if you founder at any point send me your questions through a messenger.

Love to you & family

Bapu

12. Gandhi's letter dated 14th November 1946, written to the author from a village in Noakhali, East Bengal, giving Gandhi's comments on the drafts of the author's letters to the Secretary of State and to Sir Stafford Cripps conveying to them Gandhi's views on the state of things in India

him one of our ablest men. He has been doing very good work and we expect him in future to do even more responsible work.

The India League has a variety of people in it. As an organization it is far the most effective one from India's point of view in England. It has its failings and it has made mistakes in the past. That can be said of every organization in India or outside. We intend to take full advantage of the India League organization, in so far as we can.

Krishna Menon has been away from England almost continuously since you went there except for a few very busy days when he went back at our instance. He will be returning to England soon charged with other work on our behalf. You should keep in touch with him, and if you have any grievance you should tell him about it. Normally, of course, you should be guided by Vellodi's advice.

I imagine that you will soon get over your difficulties. How soon depends upon you more than others. We cannot control others, but we can always try to shape our own behaviour so as to overcome difficulties. I think you are capable of doing very good work in England because you are eager, intelligent and enthusiastic. You can make friends and can get on with people but you will require experience and, if I may say so, are a bit raw. That will go soon enough and it is not very important except that it may create difficulties, to begin with.

I think that your initial contact with politics was rather upside down. You started on a level of dealing with Ministers and others in regard to high matters of state policy. Though you acted merely as an agent of others in this matter, this accustomed you to a certain procedure which is not the normal procedure. You will remember that when you saw me some months ago I told you that your communicating directly with Ministers in England was risky business, though sometimes it might be useful. It would lead them to suppose that you were representing us when, in fact, you might not be. It might lead to our being committed without the other party committing itself.

I find from your letters such as I have seen in the past and recently that you have not developed enough restraint yet and

restraint is a very necessary quality in a person dealing with matters of moment.

I am writing to you frankly, because I like you and I want you to get on. I do not like anything happening which might come in your way and I shall certainly try to prevent such a thing occurring. But I want you to discipline yourself a little more and develop some restraint. All of us have got to undertake increasing responsibilities and the men who can do so are few.

This is entirely a personal letter and is meant for no one else. But I feel that Sardar Patel should see it as well as Mr. Vellodi. I am, therefore, sending them copies of it.

Yours sincerely,

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

*Shri Sudhir Ghosh,  
c/o The High Commissioner for India in London,  
India House,  
London*

What I disliked about this very interesting letter was its diplomatic character. Mr. Nehru said in the letter that he liked me and wanted me to get on; all of us had to undertake increasing responsibilities and the men who could do so were few. Did he really mean that I was in his view one of the people who possessed qualities necessary for men who could take responsibilities and if I satisfied him with my good work he might give me a position of responsibility? He meant nothing of the sort. With all his greatness Mr. Nehru was a man of violent personal likes and dislikes. It was my misfortune that he had developed, during the negotiations with Cabinet Mission in New Delhi, a personal dislike of me. The letter sounded very plausible but it merely concealed his prejudices. He says that after the return of the Cabinet Mission to London, the letters I wrote to Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence was risky business, because this sort of letter-writing by a person like me might commit the Congress Party without the British Government committing itself. This was a meaningless thing to say. I wrote at the request of Cripps who said my letters helped him to get an insight into what was

happening in India and he greatly valued them. Gandhiji who read the draft of each letter before it was sent found my exchanges with Cripps extremely useful. I suspect that Mr. Nehru himself found these exchanges a convenient method of making his own views known to the Labour Cabinet when he was working under Lord Wavell and was not free to communicate with the British Ministers.

What hurt me most was that the letter was not meant for me at all although it was addressed to me; it was clearly for the benefit of Vallabhbhai Patel and Vellodi, a civil servant, who was acting High Commissioner, to both of whom Mr. Nehru endorsed copies of the letter. If the letter was a genuinely personal letter meant to give some helpful advice to a younger person in whom Mr. Nehru took an interest he would never have sent a copy of it to the High Commissioner and the nice words in the letter were addressed more to Vallabhbhai Patel than to me. Mr. Nehru knew that although he did not like me, both Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel had enormous confidence in me. In the Krishna Menon-Sudhir Ghosh controversy Mr. Nehru was alone on one side and Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel were ranged against him; that was a formidable combination.

At a later date, upon my return to India, when I showed this letter to Gandhiji he read it very carefully and commented: 'It is a fascinating letter. Here is a great man, by nature kind and generous, struggling very hard to be just and fair to a younger man but miserably failing to do so because of a more powerful pull from another source.' He referred of course to Krishna Menon who so obviously represented Nehru's shadow. What the deputy 'lion', Vallabhbhai Patel, had to say on the same subject was equally interesting, as the following letter shows:

*Department of Information & Broadcasting,  
Govt of India,  
New Delhi, 29.6.47*

My dear Sudhir,

I was glad to receive your letter of the 28th May, 1947. It relieved my mind of some anxiety on your score, as, being

fully cognizant of the difficulties under which you were working, I naturally wanted to know how you were reacting to them. I am glad that you are facing up to them. I do notice the sense of depression and down-heartedness, but that is hardly the way in which one so well equipped or qualified as you are should face up to difficulties. The work of a Public Relations Officer is by no means a bed of roses at the best of times and in the best of circumstances. In your case, with so much prejudiced atmosphere around you, it requires even in a greater measure the virtues of forbearance, courage and tact. I am sure, as you get used to these difficulties, you would also know how to deal with them effectively.

I have seen Jawaharlal's letter to you. Something in it may not be quite palatable to you, but I would ask you not to feel discouraged or disappointed. Take the advice he has proffered in a spirit of calm and dignified humility. You can rest assured that I am fully posted with your side of the case and you can always rely on my sympathetic understanding of your situation. You must, of course, go to the farthest limit possible to meet the wishes of your superiors, but I would not advise you to sever altogether your connections with the Ministers of the Cabinet. There is no official rule of conduct which requires you to do so, and any person who asks you to sever those connections on a personal basis is definitely going outside his sphere. Indeed, the continuance and maintenance of those contacts would not only be in the interests of your work there, but might definitely be of some assistance to us. You should, of course, be careful not to give the impression to the High Commissioner that you are doing something behind his back. If you are tactful and deal with the High Commissioner on a basis of mutual confidence, I am sure you can avoid giving this impression.

I am very glad to hear that you have developed such valuable contacts with the Press there and also with the officers of the British Government. I am sure these would prove very good assets to you in your difficult task. We are trying our best to get some suitable assistance for you, but unfortunately the Federal Public Service Commission are taking a great deal of

time in making the recruitment, but as soon as the recruitment is made and the appointment is finally approved, there would be no delay in the approved candidate joining.

I do not think you should cut yourself off from the group of prominent British public men which has been formed. In any case with the changed status of India in future, your duties would acquire an even more important aspect and such valuable non-official contacts would prove of great advantage to us. For one thing, the old animosities with a section of British Public opinion, which has been throughout opposed to us, would disappear, and India would in fact become above party. For this reason, therefore, a non-Party group should definitely have a place in our publicity arrangements.

The latest Announcement of His Majesty's Government has, as you must have gathered from the papers, been very well received in this country, but as the irony of fate would have it, this time it is Mr. Jinnah against whom there are complaints of having evaded the straightforward acceptance of the Announcement. We are all now engaged on the many administrative questions which arise out of partition, and we are trying to tackle them with the maximum amount of goodwill and mutual collaboration possible.

We are still up against the question of Indian States, and on that point, while the latest attitude of His Majesty's Government is helpful, I am sorry to say that the officials of the Political Department by their previous commitments and the course of action they have followed have placed a very serious obstacle in our way. I only wish His Majesty's Government knew of the bitterness the unhelpful, and even obstructive, attitude of these officials has created among the general public. You must have noticed that some States consider themselves entitled to independence after Paramountcy lapses. In course of time, we shall know how best to deal with such States, but it leaves a bad taste in the mouth to reflect on how, if the Department and officers concerned had not queered our pitch, we could have been saved so much anxiety and concern.

I have received your telegram about the article in *The Times*. I have seen only the summary of the article. It seemed

to reflect the view which Jawaharlal himself has expressed several times. You need have no worry on that account.

With best wishes to Shanti and yourself,

Yours sincerely,

VALLABHBHAI

*Sudhir Ghosh, Esq.,  
Public Relations Officer,  
Office of the High Commissioner for India,  
India House, Aldwych, London, W.C.2*

I did not bother Gandhiji with my personal troubles. In fact for weeks I did not write to him. If I wrote a letter to him he would have to write a letter in reply. Who would want to add to the burden of a lonely and unhappy man who felt that he had been deserted by all his friends and he had to walk alone the rest of his life? But in the midst of all his preoccupations he would suddenly write a brief letter like this:

10.7.47 N.D.

Dear Sudhir,

I often think of both of you. Hope you are doing well. Do write occasionally.

Love to you both,

BAPU

In three little sentences he could write such a complete message and say all that there was to be said by one human being to another.

The story of what Lord Mountbatten did on arrival in India has already been written by others. I was not directly involved in it. In the absence of any hope of agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League he prepared, with the help of V. P. Menon, his plan of transfer of power to a Dominion of India or to two Dominions, in the event of the partitioning of India into two separate Sovereign States:

(a) That the leaders agree to a procedure laid down for ascertaining the wishes of the people whether there should be a division of India or not;

(b) That in the event of the decision being taken that there should only be one central authority in India, power should be transferred to the existing Constituent Assembly on a Dominion Status basis;

(c) That in the event of a decision that there should be two sovereign States in India, the central Government of each State should take over power in responsibility to their respective Constituent Assemblies, again on a Dominion Status basis;

(d) That the transfer of power in either case should be on the basis of the Government of India Act of 1935, modified to conform to the Dominion Status position;

(e) That the Governor-General should be common to both the Dominions and that the present Governor-General should be reappointed;

(f) That a Commission should be appointed for the demarcation of boundaries in the event of a decision in favour of partition;

(g) That the Governors of the provinces should be appointed on the recommendations of the respective central Governments;

(h) In the event of two Dominions coming into being, the Armed Forces in India should be divided between them. The units would be allocated according to the territorial basis of recruitment and would be under the control of the respective Governments. In the case of mixed units, the separation and redistribution should be entrusted to a Committee consisting of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck and the Chiefs of the General Staff of the two Dominions, under the supervision of a Council consisting of the Governor-General and the two Defence Ministers. This Council would automatically cease to exist as soon as the process of division was completed.

Lord Mountbatten returned to London on 19th May with this plan. As an official of the Government of which he was the head, I dutifully went to the airport to pay my respects to him. The Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee himself was there along with Lord Listowel, the acting Secretary of State for India (Lord Pethick-Lawrence had resigned by then). I modestly stood at a distance while the big people received the Viceroy. The Viceroy then looked around and saw me at a distance. He came straight to me and said: 'Thank you Sudhir, for that letter. It worked. He did come to see me.' After consultation with Lord Mountbatten the Labour Cabinet decided to give immediate Dominion Status, not to one Dominion of India, as suggested



by V. P. Menon, but to two Dominions of India and Pakistan. Mr. Attlee announced the Mountbatten Plan on 3rd June in the House of Commons. Upon his return to India Lord Mountbatten announced that he was going to bring about the transfer of power, not in June 1948, but in August 1947. Thus power was transferred, on 15th August 1947, to two Dominions, India and to Pakistan, not presided over by one Governor-General, as proposed by Lord Mountbatten, but by two Governor-Generals, Lord Mountbatten in India and Mr. Jinnah in Pakistan. And we celebrated, somewhat cheerlessly, Indian Independence in Aldwych on 15th August. General J. N. Chaudhuri who is at present the Chief of Staff of the Indian Army happened to be in London on leave; we requisitioned his services to organize a salute to the flag of free India by contingents of the Indian Armed Forces.

Early in the morning on Independence Day I got a telegram which said: 'Thoughts and happy wishes for the future. Love from Stafford and Isobel Cripps.' It was sent from their country home in Gloucestershire. Next day they returned to London and my wife and I had dinner with them that evening. Stafford who was reputed to be a man of iron will, like Vallabhbhai Patel, was almost in tears; he said Jawaharlal had exchanged congratulatory messages with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for India and a number of other people in London but had not acknowledged Stafford's telegram of congratulations. Mr. Nehru who was the soul of courtesy and kindness when he chose to be could often be cruel to those who broke their hearts over him. Stafford told me that evening at dinner that if Jawaharlal had trusted him India would never have been divided into two sovereign States. To this day I remain convinced that he was right.

On 15th August 1947, our first Independence Day, Krishna Menon became the High Commissioner of India in London—and my boss. It became clear in no time that it was no longer possible for me to function in London. In the first week of October I received a cable from Vallabhbhai Patel telling me that Lord Ismay, Chief of Staff to Lord Mountbatten, was coming to London for consultations and that I was to return to

New Delhi in Ismay's special plane for a short visit. Lord Ismay brought with him a letter for me from Gandhiji, dated 7th October, in which he said, among other things, 'I am quite clear that you should leave that place.'

When I reached New Delhi, I found that Gandhiji had arranged for me to stay at Birla House where he was staying. I told him my tale. He carefully listened to every detail and said, 'Now that you have told me all these things, I will take care of them. You can go away with a light heart.' He did not say 'I told you so'.

Gandhiji told me that the trouble between Krishna Menon and me had caused a serious clash between Vallabhbhai and the Prime Minister. 'We cannot afford to have a fight', Gandhiji said, 'between these two lions . . . and if they want to fight let them fight over something else. I do not want you to be the subject of the fight. So you go to Jawaharlal and tell him that you have done all you could to help the Government during a difficult transition period when he did not have his own man as High Commissioner. Now you are not prepared to stay on in London because no useful purpose would be served by your continued presence there.' I did so.

On this occasion I remember I groused against Mr. Nehru at some length and remarked: 'You know, Bapu, one day this Krishna Menon will probably destroy Panditji.' He said, 'I think I know what you mean. If you mean that, with all his greatness, Jawaharlal is a poor judge of men, I think I agree with you. But tell me, have you anything better than him in India?' 'Of course we haven't,' I said promptly. 'Then be loyal to the good that is in this man. If you do that you will be all right. But if you are resentful, you are defeated. And I do not want to see you defeated. I know he is prejudiced against you. But it cannot be helped. I tried to put it right but I failed. You have to accept it as a fact of life and live with it.'

Gandhiji added that he accepted H. N. Brailsford's analysis of Krishna Menon's personality as accurate and fair and handed to me a letter in which Brailsford had said to Gandhiji:

*37 Belsize Park Gardens  
London N.W.3  
24th October, 1947*

My dear Gandhiji,

May I send you a line of greetings and of deep sympathy from my wife and myself? We hope that you may have strength to bear the load that lies on your shoulders in these difficult days.

I should like, if I may, to give you my impressions about Sudhir Ghosh's problem. I thought him an admirable choice for the very important job he has to do. He wins confidence at once. He is liked and trusted. Moreover he has shown enterprise and imagination in devising new ways of winning a friendly interest for India in this country.

But given the awkward relationship between him and Krishna Menon, I doubt whether his talents will be able to achieve as much as he could do in more congenial surroundings.

At the risk of seeming to interfere, may I say a word about Krishna? I have known him for many years. I never myself had any disagreement or personal unpleasantness in my dealings with him. I respect him for his devotion and his hard work. But he is a sick man whose relations with his fellows can never be normal or happy. He seems always to create round himself an atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue. He split the Indian community in London and for years it gave a painful exhibition of disunity. He was no more successful in dealing with Englishmen. Some few devoted friends of India like Sorensen and Agatha Harrison could work with him. But he antagonized many who could have been enlisted, by a more kindly and tactful personality than his. He is a man of first-rate ability in certain directions, but his gift is not for dealing in a friendly and trustful way with others—whether as equals or subordinates.

We are both thinking of you and of India and our many Indian friends with warm sympathy, if also with anxiety.

Yours ever,

NOEL BRAILSFORD

Thus Gandhiji decided that I was to return to India. The day I left New Delhi for London he said: 'Your place is in India. There is no shortage of work for a man like you. Vallabh-bhai has enormous confidence in you. You can have a choice of many different jobs. And if you are in India you can do various odd and ends for me. I would like that.'

So I went back to London to wind up my affairs and to return to India in December 1947. Winter in London can be very bleak for an Indian, and my wife, who did not approve of the English weather, was delighted at the prospect of going home to the lovely sunshine of New Delhi's winter. She, a doctor, was doing a post-graduate course in the London University School of Tropical Medicine and was to take an examination in the following April; but she was doing it merely to fill her time usefully and was not at all sorry to give it up in the middle. So she started her packing and winding up our flat to get ready to go home. But, lo and behold, a letter comes from Gandhiji to tell her that while I was returning to India there was no reason why she should return, too; she was not to leave her medical course unfinished; it would be such a waste. Gandhiji had decided that she was to stay in London till the following April on her own; but there was no need for her to worry; he, Gandhiji, had written letters to Agatha Harrison and some of his other Quaker friends and asked them to look after her!

Nobody had asked for Gandhiji's advice as to what she should do. How could anybody worry him about such a small personal problem at a time like that. He was then a man of many sorrows; but he, the father, had time to remember that a young woman, 6,000 miles away, was in the middle of a medical course and he had time to decide what she should do and the decision was duly conveyed! It had to be obeyed. The hairs of your head were counted, as the Bible says.

Upon my return to India I was sent for a brief spell to Hyderabad to assist K. M. Munshi, the Agent General of the Government of India, to negotiate the integration of Hyderabad with India. I was later posted in the Punjab under the Ministry of States to lend a hand in the winding up of the princely States

of Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kalsia and Nalagarh. While at Hyderabad in January 1948 I got a message from Gandhiji asking me to come and spend a few days with him in New Delhi. He wanted to know what chances there were of integrating Hyderabad without the use of military force. Thus fate brought me back to him for the last three days of his life, 28th, 29th and 30th January 1948. On 30th January at noon he called me to the back garden of Mr. Birla's house, where he was sitting in the sun in a cot and working at his papers. I found him deeply immersed in his work in the January sun of New Delhi, with a Burmese peasant's hat on his head. It had been presented to him by U Nu who had visited New Delhi a little earlier. As I sat down he handed to me a letter written to him by Agatha Harrison enclosing with it a clipping from the London *Times*. Agatha's letter said that the whispering campaign about a serious rift between his two lieutenants, Mr. Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel, had spread to London and *The Times* editorial on this rift between the two men was a bad omen; was Gandhiji not going to do something about it?

I read the letter and the editorial and waited for him to say something. He finished the writing of whatever he was working at and said: 'I wonder what I am going to do about it'—as if asking himself a question. I said: 'Well, they are so big that nobody dares to talk to them about it; but people talk behind their backs. Some day you may like to talk to both of them about it. You alone can do it.' He pondered over my remark and said: 'Well, there is something in what you say. I think I am going to talk about it. I think I will talk about it after prayers this evening at the prayer meeting. Vallabhbhai is coming to see me at 4. Jawaharlal is coming to see me at 7. You can come and see me just before I go to bed.' So I left him with his writing and his thoughts.

In the afternoon at 4 I went to the Ministry of States where some of the Hyderabad Ministers were holding a discussion with the officials of the Ministry. Soon after 5 someone walked in and excitedly said, 'Gandhiji has been shot.' We got up but none of us really believed that he was killed. How could anybody kill a man like him? I reached Birla House within ten

minutes and found that quite a large crowd had already gathered outside the house. With some difficulty I got in and went to the back room on the ground floor where Gandhiji used to live. They had brought him back to the room and laid him on the mattress on the floor on which he used to sit and work. His beloved Jawaharlal and Vallabhbhai were beside him: one, an emotional man, had buried his face in the father's clothes and was sobbing; the other, a man of iron will, was holding the father's hand, looking stunned and speechless, feeling his pulse to see if there was still any life left. At 4 o'clock Vallabhbhai had come to see Gandhiji and was deeply upset when the question of his rift with the other son was raised; he had so much to get off his chest that he would not stop talking and went on and on. At 5 minutes past five Abha, his grand-nephew, Kanu Gandhi's wife, held Gandhiji's watch before him to remind him that it was past prayer time. It was an extremely rare occurrence for him to be late even by one minute for his prayer meeting. He said he must tear himself away and got up and walked up to the prayer grounds and as he approached the congregation and raised his folded palms to accept the greetings of those who had assembled for prayer, a man stepped forward, bent as if to touch Gandhiji's feet and fired a shot. The last word he uttered as he fell was 'He Ram', the favourite name of his God. Then followed the night-long vigil. Several hundreds of thousands came during the night to have their last look at the body of the father. Lord Mountbatten urged that Gandhi's body be preserved like Lenin's body in Moscow. The debate was disposed of by Pyarelalji, Gandhiji's faithful disciple, secretary and friend, who pointed out that it was the father's wish that after his death his body should be burnt at the nearest cremation ground. Thus next day, in the presence of over a million men and women, Gandhi's mortal remains were burnt to ashes at Rajghat. His body went back to the earth, water, light, air and the sky. Our father, Bapu, as we called him, went back to his Rama.



*PART TWO*

THE NEHRU ERA





## CHAPTER TEN

### *A Revolution that did not come off*

IN MY love-hate relationship with Mr. Nehru there was one place where love for a time overcame hate and that was the pioneering project of Community Development at Faridabad in the Gurgaon district of the Punjab to which I devoted myself from 1948 to 1952. After Gandhiji's death on 30th January 1948 I worked for some months under Vallabhbhai Patel's Ministry of States as Regional Commissioner, East Punjab States, to lend a hand in winding up the princely States of Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kalsia, Nalagarh and putting them together into the new province of Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) which was later integrated with the Punjab State. My headquarters were at Simla and I was given a Maharaja's Palace, 'Ravenswood', as my residence and office. From this palatial house in the mountains, standing on a promontory, one could get a lovely view of a deep valley and waves of indigo mountains beyond. My wife and I loved that view and I rather enjoyed my numerous trips down to the plains every month, into the interior of the seven princely States. I toured a lot in the villages because one of my main responsibilities was to ensure that the Hindus and Sikhs of the States did not unlawfully take possession of about 500,000 acres of good agricultural land left behind by the Muslims who went over to Pakistan. For this land was badly needed by the East Punjab Government to resettle the Sikh and Hindu refugees who came over from Pakistan.

After about ten months I got tired of my Maharaja's Palace and the view of the indigo mountains and I grew impatient to bite my teeth into something more real than the business of assisting the Government to decide what was a Maharaja's

personal property and what belonged to the State. In one State I found that, in anticipation of coming events, the Maharaja had got his own name entered into the revenue records of every plot of land in his State as the direct owner of it to show that all land in his State was his personal property. I found the game of diplomacy with the Maharajas, who were extremely pleasant to me personally, quite unexciting, and as soon as the Patiala and East Punjab States Union was formed I asked Vallabhbhai Patel for a transfer, in December 1948.

Since I asked for a tough job I was put into the Ministry of Refugee Rehabilitation with the rank of a Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. As a result of the partitioning of India we had six million displaced persons, Hindus and Sikhs, who came over from West Pakistan; almost an equal number of Muslims left India and went over to Pakistan. Never in the history of the world has there been such mass migration of twelve million human beings. All that was best in Jawaharlal Nehru, his sensitivity and his compassion, came out in shining glory in this work of resettling these millions of uprooted human beings. Normally an impatient man who found it difficult to suffer fools, he was never short of time where the refugees were concerned and was prepared to suffer any number of fools for their sake.

Delhi itself absorbed one and half million refugees and there were several hundreds of thousands in tented camps in the districts around Delhi. Whenever any group of refugees had any grievance they had one potent weapon which they always used; they went in large bunches and sat at the entrance to the Prime Minister's House and would not go until something was done to remove the cause of what was troubling them. Whether it was my job or not the Prime Minister would summon me to his house at all odd hours of the day and night to deal with refugee grievances of all sorts. Late one evening he rang me up to tell me that he could not eat his dinner because a bunch of refugees who had come from a camp in Gwalior were sitting on his doorsteps and they would not go; he had a guest, Dr. Mohammad Hatta, Vice-President of Indonesia, staying at the house and it was all very embarrassing. So I went to the Prime

Minister's House and after a lengthy debate persuaded the refugees to go back to Gwalior after arranging with the Commissioner of Gwalior, on the telephone, that he would find a solution of their problem. But the refugees had no money and I needed 300 rupees to buy their railway tickets. But the Prime Minister never possessed a purse or kept any money in his pocket. We ransacked his house but the secretaries and others who were around could not produce more than a few rupees. So I drove down to the houses of a few friends in search of some money at that hour and somehow collected the 300 rupees; then triumphantly I went back to the Prime Minister and sent off the refugees to Gwalior, so that the Prime Minister and his eminent guest could go to dinner. Next morning he wrote a charming letter enclosing a cheque from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund and added: 'I send you the 300 rupees which you were clever enough to raise last night by some magic!'

While working in the Refugee Rehabilitation Ministry I found that we were spending hundreds of millions of rupees in giving only food and shelter to the refugees, without any hope of a return from that vast expenditure. Those who could till the soil were fairly easy to resettle. If they were given their share of the evacuee land left behind by the Muslims, and some assistance to buy their bullocks and seeds for a few seasons, they soon settled down. But the urban refugees, particularly the middle-man variety who bought and sold and made some profits and produced no real wealth, were the most difficult ones to resettle. One such group, about 40,000 in number, lived in a tented camp at Faridabad, a village twenty miles south of Delhi on the Delhi-Agra road. They were Hindu and Sikh Pathans from the North West Frontier Province, very spirited people. There were frequent troubles between these refugees and the Camp Commandant, an Army Colonel, whose job was to distribute relief worth something like one rupee per head per day, and provide some minimum medical and sanitary services and generally maintain order. I had to go down to this place whenever there was trouble and often talked with the proud Pathans, and I rather liked them.

I asked Mr. Nehru if he would allow me to make a social

experiment with this Community of 40,000 refugees. The Government was spending on an average one rupee per head per day on their food and shelter, i.e. 40,000 rupees a day or 1,200,000 per month or 14,400,000 per year and in three years it would cost the Government 43,200,000 merely to feed them and to keep them alive, which the Government was committed to do as an act of charity anyhow. I proposed to take that much of money as a loan on behalf of this community, to create work for the working population among them and invest this capital in such a manner that out of their work would grow a new town which would be their permanent home, with industries that would provide permanent means of livelihood for them; then integrate this urban-industrial nucleus with a rural-agricultural community of 200 villages around the town; the annual return from the investment would amortize the community's debt to Government in about twenty or twenty-five years. If the experiment succeeded we would multiply it a thousandfold.

Mr. Nehru jumped at the idea. He was always willing to support any revolutionary idea. He was at heart a revolutionary who did not have to go through an actual revolution. He took a vicarious pleasure in other people's revolutions. And that was the clue to his natural sympathy for the Russian revolution and the Chinese revolution; although the sensitive man in him was repelled by the cruelties of those revolutions.

I told Mr. Nehru that this sort of an idea could not be implemented by the normal machinery of the Government. I asked for his support for the creation of an authority called the Faridabad Development Board which would be free to function as an autonomous body, something like a small-scale Tennessee Valley Authority. Mr. Nehru not only supported the proposal but attended without fail every single monthly meeting of the Faridabad Development Board for three years, although he was not a member of it. He was excited about the demonstration I offered to make. Dr. Rajendra Prasad accepted the Chairmanship of this little Board. When he became President of India in January 1950, Dr. H. N. Kunzru, another eminent leader, became the Chairman. We had on the Board two very rare spirits, Mrs. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, President of the

Indian Cooperative Union, and Mrs. Asha Devi Aryanayakam of Gandhiji's Basic Education Organization at Sevagram. Both of them participated very actively in the work at Faridabad and gave me not only moral support but spiritual sustenance. My assistant, Lakshmi Jain, a young man who combined compassion and administrative ability in an unusual measure, was an invaluable asset.

So I left my comfortable air-conditioned office in New Delhi and my wife and I set up our home, as well as working headquarters, in four war-time round Nissen tin huts purchased from army disposals, on a barren piece of land measuring about 3,500 acres, on which there was not even one single brick standing. That was the summer of 1949. On 2nd March 1952 when Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited this Community at Faridabad this is what she wrote in her famous syndicated column in the United States, 'My Day':

'Faridabad is one pilot project which, if it is successful, must be multiplied not hundreds but thousands of times all over India. Strangely enough the physical plan is made by an American Architect, Mr. Albert Myer, who works in New York and comes only occasionally to India, It is an ambitious plan but simply carried out. The people themselves build their houses which consist of two rooms, a kitchen and a room which may one day be a bathroom but at present is merely a tap with running water. Sanitary privies have been built, tube wells have been sunk and the water is good because it comes from 350 feet below the surface.

'The town is laid out around a central large open space and arrangements are made for people to build shelter for their animals at the back of their houses or in separate space reserved for the animals. Each area is like a small village in itself, containing two schools, a health centre and a public market in which artisans can buy space to ply their trade or merchants can sell their goods. A hospital of 150 beds is planned to serve not only the town community but the outlying area of 200,000 acres on which live about 200,000 people in villages.

'At one end of the town is a factory area which will give employment to the people of the town who are not busy in running the services needed by any populated area. Some factories are owned by individual firms and are already working. One part of it is

reserved for a community diesel engine plant, where diesel engines and small primus stoves are turned out. This is a community project and the profits will go to financing the health and education services of the town. Each individual living there pays Rs.10 a month toward these services and the amortization of their debt. The financing is made possible by the creation of an authority which borrowed from the Government the equivalent of what the Government would have paid these people in relief over three years.

'Buying the material and paying them wages, the authority induced people who had been before small shopkeepers or clerical workers, to go to work and produce things with their hands. This has been accomplished in spite of the fact that here, usually as far back as can be remembered, each generation has worked in the same occupation and a shopkeeper considers himself considerably better than the man who works with his hands.

'We visited one of the outlying villages and I met the leading men of the village who told me that what they needed most was water and it was quite evident that they did need it. Irrigation would double their crops and help solve the problem of food in India. I walked through the village of mud houses and walls and looked into the rooms. I saw their cattle and general way of life. Sanitation will take time and when I thought of the little health centre and the one health visitor who covered the village with her assistant trying to teach the principles of sanitation, I realized again what the problem of education was for the future.

'I used to think in the early thirties in the U.S.A. that we faced a fairly staggering problem of unemployment but the people working here have an even greater challenge. The director, however, of this community, Dr. Sudhir Ghosh, is equal to his job, one of the most inspiring and dedicated people I have ever met.'

Today there stands at Faridabad the largest industrial town of the Punjab State. The population has grown into 80,000 and many large and complicated industries, including a 500-acre factory for producing rubber tyres, other factories for manufacturing modern tractors, motor bicycles and scooters and electrical motors and transformers have grown rapidly around the original refugee town of 3,500 acres. Why have industries grown? Because the original refugee town provided a community of workmen who were already housed and provided with all social services of health, education as well as

electric power and water and other services for industries. In financial terms this industrial town is a great success but this was not the Faridabad of my dreams. What went wrong with the revolutionary concept and how much of it went right and the causes of its failures and successes are a fascinating story worth telling for the benefit of the younger generation of India. For in this venture I encountered on a realizable scale the forces which are slowly throttling the New India of their dreams.

We planned to create work for the working population out of the community of 40,000 and out of their work to produce bricks and doors and windows and bolts and nuts and stones from the nearby hills and digging and earthwork and road building and putting things together into houses and other public buildings. Everybody was to be paid only the value of his work according to the prevailing market rate. And all the work put in by the people was to be their co-operative effort. If you ask a shopkeeper who is a stubborn individualist to become a member of a co-operative group you are almost asking for the impossible. But the impossible can be achieved if you are sufficiently persistent. When I first said, 'Come on chaps, we are going to build a town', they thought I had lost my balance of mind. For the first six months my main function was to talk and talk—until I was blue in the face—to the leaders of the community, morning, noon and night, to persuade them to work instead of living on Government charity. They said they were very willing to work but they were shopkeepers; their fathers were shopkeepers and their grandfathers were also shopkeepers; how could they build a town? Towns were built by contractors and Government engineers. Was I mad that I expected simple people to build a town?

The first step was to induce the community to make the millions of bricks that were needed to build the town. We patiently explained that brick making was not a complicated job. You mix earth and water and make a soft lump and put it into a wooden mould to give it the shape of a brick and you dry it in the sun; then you dig a circular trench and fill it up with the sun-dried bricks and cover up the trench with earth and fix a couple of chimneys, so that the smoke can



go out when you fire the bricks from inside the trench. You start a coal fire at one end of the circular trench and the fire gradually travels to the other end. When burnt bricks get cooled you take them out and fill in the gaps with fresh sun-dried bricks and thus brick-burning goes on as a continuous process. But all this explanation was no good. Our shopkeepers shook their heads and said that they had never done such a thing before. So we got from the villages a small number of professional brick makers (about 5 per cent of the total number) and they showed the others how bricks were made. But the erstwhile shopkeepers were still unconvinced. Twenty brick kilns were to produce in two and a half years all the millions of bricks that went into the making of 6,000 houses, the big hospital and the health centres, the power house and other public buildings. Twenty co-operatives of fifty families each had to be formed. The capital necessary—about one million rupees—for the brick project was to be advanced to the co-operatives by our Board from its borrowed capital of about Rs. 25 million. The co-operatives were to produce the bricks and I was to buy them, as Administrator, on behalf of the community; out of the earning the outsiders were to be paid for; a part was to be set aside for repayment of the capital in instalments; and the balance was to be divided by the co-operatives amongst their members and thus  $50 \times 20 = 1,000$  families could earn their livelihood.

In spite of their lack of faith they agreed to have a try. When something begins to happen people do not like to be left out of it for fear that they might miss something. So gradually and reluctantly they started work. When the first brick kiln got going they discovered that the cost of production of 1,000 bricks was about Rs. 21; we purchased the bricks at the rate of Rs.30 per thousand and out of the profit of Rs.-9 per thousand, even after paying the professional brick makers they were left with enough to make it an attractive proposition. There appeared to be good money in this business. And that was how the twenty brick kilns produced all the millions of bricks that went into the making of the Faridabad town.

The same was the story of the carpentry co-operatives. If

you required eight doors and windows for each small house you required 48,000 doors and windows for the 6,000 houses alone, in addition to many more required for each of the institutional buildings. We formed two big co-operatives of 250 families each and thus 500 families were to earn their living. For this particular part of the job a larger percentage of outsiders had to be brought in because the degree of skill required was greater. Fortunately we had quite a number of Sikhs in the community who had a natural liking for carpentry work and they very soon got accustomed to the work of this department.

For a community of 40,000 and industries to produce their permanent means of livelihood we needed a vast quantity of water. There was no river or canal nearby from which we could draw water. The nearest source of water was the Jamuna near Delhi, a distance of eighteen miles, and it was much too expensive for a refugee community to lay a pipeline for this distance. We could not afford it. The only solution of the water problem appeared to be sub-soil water. The Government engineers said that there was no sub-soil water in the region and it was no use drilling tubewells there. So with all our enthusiasm it did not seem to be a practicable proposition to build a town there, the engineers said. In despair I spoke to Mr. Nehru who told me that the Jamsaheb of Navanagar in Gujarat had told him about the water diviner in his State who had an extraordinary feeling for water. 'Why don't you write to the Jamsaheb and say that I asked you to do so,' said Mr. Nehru. I wrote frantically to the Kathiawar prince and within a few days a tall man with a big turban on his head arrived. He introduced himself to me as 'Paniwala Maharaj' who had been sent by the Jamsaheb.

The Army Colonel who was still there at Faridabad looking after the camping arrangements of the refugees scoffed at the idea of a water diviner. It was all so unscientific, said the Colonel. The Colonel and I, however, walked over the 3,500 acres of land along with the Paniwala Maharaj and from time to time the man with the big turban on his head would stop and stamp his foot at a particular spot and say, 'Here, you have water.' So I got hold of a drilling rig and a crew and drilled ten

holes in the ten places pointed out by the water diviner. And sure enough the water was not only there but it was in abundance. What a joy it was for our refugees when they saw the first gush of water as we lowered the pipes into the first tubewell and started pumping. Each of these yielded something like 30,000 gallons of water per hour and if you worked them for only ten hours a day you could get 300,000 gallons per tubewell or 3,000,000 gallons per day in ten tubewells and if you provided thirty gallons per day per head for 40,000 refugees, i.e. 1,200,000 gallons, you were left with enough for your industries. We drilled ten deep tubewells of from twelve to fourteen inches diameter and 350 feet deep. Each had to be fitted up with a turbine pump or a centrifugal pump together with electric motors or diesel engines for power. Up to this day there is no other source of water for this large industrial town with all its big industries except these tubewells (a few more have since been drilled by the big private enterprises) in an area where we were told scientifically by engineers that there was no water and a town could not be built.

Fifty miles of asphalted road had to be built as a part of our town building. Every bit of the stone that was required for the building of the roads was broken by the manual labour of the settlers. The stone quarries in the nearby hills absorbed about 500 families divided into co-operative groups. A large amount of transport work was needed for the building of the town. Funds were advanced by the Board to purchase seventy motor trucks for seventy co-operatives of fifteen families each and thus providing work for 1,050 families. Fifty thousand trees had to be planted by the roadside and in open spaces. We organized a tree nursery of our own and distributed the saplings, free of cost, to the settlers to encourage them to grow trees in this very hot part of the country.

The next job was to put the bricks and stones and cement and sand together into well planned neat little houses. The houses built were simple structures but a small number of masons and brick-layers had to be brought from outside. Building materials such as cement and bricks and sand and a small amount of steel were issued from our Central Store to the

co-operative groups of the settlers and the cost of these was deducted from the cost of the houses and the balance represented the income of the groups. It was for the groups to build them as fast or as slowly as they wished. If a group undertook to build twenty houses it would receive Rs.38,660 at the rate of Rs.1,933 per house minus the cost of materials supplied and it was entirely up to the group to complete the job in three months or four months or more; the shorter the period the larger the income.

The general pattern of the organization of the 8,000 workers of the community was briefly this: they formed themselves into several hundreds of groups based on co-operative principles. Each group had a membership of a minimum of ten and although there was no ceiling fixed the maximum number did not exceed twenty-five to thirty. One person out of the group became the Group Leader. The Group Leader went up to the Board's engineer and received materials and payments on behalf of the group. The earnings of the group were shared equally by all the working members. Those who fell sick while at work or had an accident were entitled to relief from our Board for the period that they had to be absent from work.

Initially the members in each group were persons closely related to each other. As the work proceeded and the workers had to share the earnings equally between themselves—the younger people in the group who put in greater and harder work were not happy about sharing their earnings with older folk whose output was comparatively small. At one stage the earlier composition of all the groups changed and the ties of kinship broke down. As a result a number of groups consisted of only old men who could not take up jobs which involved strenuous work. To meet this new situation we had to classify and reserve work of a lighter nature for such groups.

During the first year of working the Groups evolved a number of rules from time to time and set up conventions which helped them in carrying out their business and settling their disputes. But there was one development which endangered the very principles of the co-operative group system. Most of the group leaders gradually acquired great control over their fellow

members and did not make fair use of their influential position. The workers made numerous complaints against the group leaders. But every complainant wanted his identity to be kept a secret and every group leader charged with some unfair practice demanded a proof. It became a vicious chain. But it was obvious that if the same persons continued as group leaders the group system would break down sooner or later.

We suggested election of group leaders by the members of each group; the result was that nearly 90 per cent of the group leaders managed to retain their positions and it soon became obvious that this step did not serve its purpose. We ultimately suggested that each group should draw lots to pick its leader and the result was that in more than 90 per cent of cases new leaders were elected. The established group leaders were angry with their respective groups, walked out of them and organized themselves to agitate against this new method of electing a leader. Some of their arguments were very powerful but the community structure could be maintained only on the strength of honest intentions of its leadership. They, however, found no sympathy from the large body of workers and most of them soon rejoined the groups, reconciled to the idea of being ordinary persons with no special claims.

By the end of the first year the whole population had settled down to hard work which kept them engaged. But the process of consulting them at every stage of planning and its execution continued in greater measure. The community now felt that the advice rendered by its representatives dealt with important matters of policy, administration, management of social services and other matters of immediate concern to them. We found that this was the opportune moment for suggesting the setting up of a committee of representatives to be elected by the community on the basis of adult franchise. This was accepted by them.

Faridabad thus made the first experiment in organizing an election on the basis of adult franchise in June 1950—eighteen months earlier than the first General Elections in the country towards the end of 1951. Faridabad prepared its electoral rolls and the men and women entitled to vote—out of a com-

munity of 40,000—were 18,000, out of which nearly 16,000 came to the polls to elect eleven Committee members out of thirty-five candidates, one of whom was a schoolmistress. At the close of the day the ballot boxes were sealed and locked into a room and it was decided to count the ballots the following morning. Most of the candidates spent the night keeping a vigil! It was a splendid achievement for a people who only some months ago showed no signs of even being organized into a socially conscious and an active and responsible community. The real achievement of Faridabad was not the houses, roads, hospitals and schools but what happened to the human beings as a result of doing the work they did.

How the electric power problem of the project was solved is another fascinating story. The town had to be electrified and a great deal of power was required because the permanent means of livelihood of the settlers was going to be factory jobs. The community could not afford to purchase a new big power plant out of its borrowed capital of Rs.25 million and it was thus decided to acquire a second-hand German plant which came to India as India's part of German reparations. A 6,000 kW. power plant consisting of two turbo sets was erected in a ship-building yard in Hamburg four years before the war. During the war the plant was bombed and partially damaged. At the end of the war it was dismantled by the U.S. Army and given to the Indians who carried the plant in 150 crates from Hamburg to Calcutta. It lay in the Calcutta docks for eighteen months in the open and enjoyed the Bengal monsoon while it was hawked to every department of Government. No Government engineer was prepared to accept it because of the doubt about its workability. There was neither an inventory to show what was there and what was missing, nor any drawing to show how the plant could be put together. I asked Mr. Nehru if I could have the plant for my refugee community. Since the Government officials concerned would not take the responsibility of finding somebody to use it the Prime Minister asked them to give it to me on the understanding that our Board was to pay the disposal value of the plant.

Through the Indian Military Mission in Berlin I tracked

down a mechanical engineer in Hamburg who worked in this power plant when it was functioning in the Blom and Voss Shipyard. The head of the Military Mission sent me the particulars of the qualifications and experience of this engineer and some other German engineers who were willing to come out to India. In 1949-50 the Germans were down and out and I was surprised at the low salary these engineers were willing to accept. Looking at the papers it seemed that Johannes Doll was the man for my job but the Indian Military Mission did not recommend him. They explained that this man did not speak a word of English; the others did. But sitting in my hut in Faridabad I decided to employ Johannes Doll because he was familiar with the plant; I did not care if he spoke English or not. The Indian Military Mission reluctantly sent Doll out to India. My wife and I went to the Palam Airport to meet this stranger who did not understand a word we said but he understood that he was very welcome. Human warmth can break the barrier of languages in no time. We soon found a young man who had a working knowledge of the German language to act as an interpreter.

I offered this stranger from Germany a hotel room in Delhi and transport to take him to Faridabad every day, for that way he would be comfortable. But he would have none of it. He said that he wanted a little tin hut like mine right at the plant site. He had no other interest except his work. The man proved to be a devil of a worker. I handed over to him half a dozen raw young Indian engineers. 'Well, Mr. Doll, this is young Nangia', I said as I introduced to him one of our young men and added, 'He got a first-class degree in electrical engineering. He is going to work for you.' 'We shall see', said the dour little German engineer as he looked gravely at the boy. The boys soon discovered what a hard task-master he was; but they loved him for the way he taught them all about boilers and turbines and generators. They prepared the drawings for the power plant by literally taking the measurement of the bits and pieces that were found after the crates were unpacked.

It was like a jig-saw puzzle of which hundreds of parts were missing. Fortunately the main parts, the two turbines and the

two generators were in perfect condition. The tubes of the water-tube boilers were mercilessly hacked by the German workmen who resented having to dismantle their own power plant under orders of the U.S. Army. These tubes could not be used without very extensive welding. We did not have welders with that degree of skill in India. So I got Johannes Doll to write to a welder in Hamburg whom he knew and to get him to come out to Faridabad. I had to organize a scrounging campaign in all sorts of places in Calcutta and Bombay and even some places in Britain to get the odds and ends to fill in the gaps in my jig-saw puzzle.

Then we discovered that we had to lift boiler drums weighing fifty tons to a height of ninety feet. It was no use searching for a fifty-ton crane. For there was none to be had anywhere in the region. 'Well, Mr. Doll, what are you going to do now', I asked the German engineer. He scratched his head and said, 'We will do somefing'. Well he did something. I got him six screw jacks and a lot of wooden sleepers and, sleeper upon sleeper, this determined little man, lifted up the fifty-ton boiler drums, inch by inch, to a height of ninety feet; he then placed underneath the steel 'legs' which he himself fabricated in his own workshop with the help of the young Indian engineers. Then he gradually removed the sleepers and there stood at the height of ninety feet the boiler drums in their proper places to supply water to the water tube boilers. The engineer who could not function without a fifty-ton crane and the normal tools of work in that situation was useless in an underdeveloped country.

As we went ahead with the building of the town we felt the increasing need for a well-equipped engineering workshop. I looked for suitable lathes and other equipment and machinery and I stumbled upon a large collection of valuable machine tools in the Bombay dockyards which had arrived as a part of German reparations. We purchased 361 units of these machine tools and discovered that by using them we could manufacture diesel engines. The machine tools originally belonged to a big plant in Cologne for manufacturing diesel engines. We were importing into India from other countries in



1949-50 about 50,000 diesel engines a year of various sizes. These engines were badly needed as prime movers for drawing water from tubewells for agricultural irrigation or as power wherever electricity was not available. There was a vast demand for these engines all over South East Asia. India had a total installed capacity of 5,300 engines a year at the time and we had to manufacture something like 45,000 more per year to meet our own demands. The machine tools got together at Faridabad (supplemented by a small number of new machines) could manufacture 4,000 twelve h.p. engines per year. A part of the community's borrowed capital—about Rs.2 million—was therefore set aside for this department as a profitable investment. We took a German engine to pieces, copied every part of it and put them together and found that it worked. The workers of the community discovered in six months' time that every part of the German diesel engine could be manufactured on the spot.

It was a great day when we made our first diesel engine in Faridabad in January 1951. We proudly put the engine on a truck and drove down to the Prime Minister's office in Parliament House to present our first diesel engine to Mr. Nehru. The Prime Minister came out of his office and jumped on to the motor truck in his boyish enthusiasm to inspect the engine made in Faridabad. The representatives of the refugee community started up the engine to show the Prime Minister that it really worked. Mr. Nehru was thrilled. I could in those days go to him, and get him to write a letter, such as this one to the Minister for Refugee Rehabilitation under whom our Faridabad authority functioned:

*New Delhi*

*January 24, 1951*

My dear Ajit Prasad,

As you know, I have taken a great deal of interest in the diesel engine project for Faridabad. This is such an obvious necessity for us that every delay is unfortunate. Somehow or other delays have occurred and it is now nearly nine or ten months since this matter has been before us.

We have had competent advice from businessmen and experts. Apart from our own committee, F. C. Badhwar, Chairman of the Railway Board, was consulted and he agreed with K. A. D. Naoroji of Tata's.

Now I understand that the Ministry of WPS, being much impressed by the progress made at Faridabad, are prepared to offer us a great deal of machinery for diesel engine manufacture, which is at present lying in Bombay. These new machines belong to Pakistan's share of German reparations, but they have not taken them. We shall, of course, have to pay the disposal value of this plant, but it should be easy to make arrangements for that. The WPS Ministry, however, has made it clear to us that they can only let us have this machinery if they know that the plant is going to be worked soon and that we have come to a final agreement with the German firm on this subject. The machinery itself has come out of the Deutz factory.

This matter must be decided now and we cannot proceed in an unbusinesslike way talking about it indefinitely. I am told that the Director General of the Deutz Works in Germany is passing through Delhi very soon on his way to Australia. His visit should be taken advantage of to finalise this matter.

The terms have already been worked out by K. A. D. Naoroji and F. C. Badhwar and others. The Faridabad Board has approved of the whole scheme and we should go ahead with the scheme.

If necessary, we can arrange a meeting with the Director General of the Deutz Works here in Delhi and I can see him also.

Yours sincerely,

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

*The Hon'ble Shri Ajit Prasad Jain,  
Minister of State for Rehabilitation,  
New Delhi*

Mr. Nehru was prepared to see the Director of the Klockner-Humbolt-Deutz of Cologne or anybody I asked him to see to give a push to my Faridabad Project. He was so eager to see it succeed.

ROE

Every distinguished visitor from other parts of the world to New Delhi from 1949-52 was sent down to Faridabad to spend half of a day with me to see a demonstration of what a community of ordinary men and women could do, given a little capital and some leadership, to build a new life for themselves in a self-financing and self-perpetuating community development project. Thus I made the acquaintance of men like Mr. Eugene Black who came as critics and went away converted as enthusiastic supporters. One morning I was rung up by the Finance Ministry to say that the Prime Minister had suggested to the visiting President of the World Bank that he might like to visit Faridabad. Mr. Black was at first sceptical about industries owned by the community such as the diesel engine factory and the wisdom of investing public funds on such industries. Why couldn't private enterprise do such jobs? When I explained that while we were creating conditions to attract private enterprises it seemed sensible to us to invest our borrowed capital from Government not only in houses and social services but in a few sound community industries to earn a return to pay for the health, education and other services of the community and to make it independent of doles from Government, the banker in him was satisfied and he withdrew his criticism when he saw the details of our investment and our return. Since then every time I have visited Washington Mr. Black has gone out of his way to offer courtesy and kindness.

But my fame came a little too early and unfortunately trouble started before I could complete my work. The work of building the town with its homes and services was almost complete by the beginning of 1952. Private enterprises like the Bata Shoe factory were gradually going into production. But the rural half of our work had just begun.

Imagine a group of 300 villages around this small industrial town which has sprung up in two-and-a-half years out of nothing. The population of the villages was approximately 250,000 and there were 200,000 acres of land in them. The main activity of the villager is production of food out of the soil. The soil is good but there is a shortage of water. If sufficient water is produced for the 200,000 acres of land the village

peasant can produce two crops a year out of the land which yields only one crop a year now. To produce enough water we planned to drill 400 tubewells for these 300 villages in addition to 5,000 surface wells that were already there. Sub-soil water in this area is at a depth of 300 feet and each well yields approximately 35,000 gallons per hour. You can work a well up to twenty hours a day. Even if you work them fifteen hours a day you get  $35,000 \times 15 \times 400 = 210$  million gallons a day.

The 5,000 surface wells were run by the primitive method of Persian wheels driven by camels or bullocks. The animals had to be replaced by modern pumping equipment driven by power. For power, electricity from the Central Power Station in the industrial area had to be taken to the villages or diesel engines had to be installed where electricity had not been extended. All the diesel engines required could be made at Faridabad itself.

It was calculated that the water from the 400 tubewells and the 5,000 surface wells would enable the villagers to grow a second crop out of the land. This would also enable them to produce money crops such as tobacco, cotton, sugarcane and peanuts in addition to wheat and cereals of different varieties. In addition to water the villager wanted some better seeds and fertilizers and some assistance to acquire better cattle. If you invested for this purpose approximately Rs.100/- per acre or Rs.25 million for 250,000 acres of land the capital was enough for the production of water and a loan fund for the purchase and distribution of seeds and fertilizers and cattle. You, therefore, had to recover from each acre of land approximately Rs.100 over a period of, say, ten years, i.e. Rs.10 a year, together with reasonable interest. If the yield per acre goes up double the peasant does not at all mind paying the ten rupees a year with interest because the increased yield of an acre per year is worth to him many times more.

Apart from producing a larger volume of wealth out of their land the villagers wanted the extension of the health services and the educational services of the urban industrial areas in the centre. For this purpose the 300 villages had to be divided into ten groups of thirty villages, each group with a 'mother village' to act as a base of operations for health and educational work.

For both these items of work we planned to organize the same institutions as we had in each of the five units of the central industrial area, viz., a health centre for day-to-day surgical and medical attention and the facilities of the General Hospital of the town open to cases requiring hospitalization; and two schools in each 'mother village' for primary education of boys and girls. For secondary and technical education we planned to use the high schools and technical school in the town. Health work in the villages inevitably included a programme for birth control.

To maintain the 400 tubewells and the 5,000 surface wells, and also to purchase and distribute fertilizers, seeds and cattle, we planned to form ten multi-purpose co-operatives of thirty villages each. After the borrowed capital was invested and the execution of the project was over the co-operatives were to take over the assets and the liabilities. If it was left to the villages to organize themselves into co-operatives and to utilize the borrowed capital to their best advantage, they could not do it on their own. What was to be contributed from outside therefore was a certain amount of leadership; and the outside leadership was to make itself unnecessary after a period of three to five years.

The picture that emerged was this. You take a group of ordinary men and women, largely village people (say, 250,000 in 300 villages) and partly urban industrial people (say 50,000) in the centre of the rural area; then you make an integrated unit of the two. There can be a healthy controversy about how much of the urban part is really necessary for the comprehensive development of the rural part. In the case of Faridabad we were forced to make the urban/industrial area unduly large because we started with the solution of an existing problem of making a home and creating means of livelihood for a refugee population. But in each group of 300 normal Indian villages there is no such problem of resettling newcomers. The logical way, therefore, to start such a project would be to develop the 300 villages first and then build as an apex of the rural area a less urbanized and less industrialized Faridabad. But you must produce in the area certain goods and

services mainly to serve the villages, which give the villagers a sense of better living; otherwise the cultivator will not go on producing more and more wealth out of his agricultural activities. You create intensified activities for this group of people—agricultural as well as industrial—and to finance their activities you borrow on behalf of the community a certain volume of financial resources from wherever it is available; the people's enthusiastic effort together with the extra resources produces an asset which yields an annual revenue; a part of it is paid back annually to the source from which the capital is borrowed and the balance pays for the community services of the area and meets all recurring expenditure. Nothing is given or taken as charity. If you can prove this in an actual demonstration project you have found an answer to the problem of underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and South America. Mere collection of resources from the richer countries and distributing these resources to the poorer countries either bilaterally or through the U.N. is no answer to anybody's problem.

By the end of 1951 we had done enough to show that we had almost reached our target, viz., to prove our case. The temporary work of building the town which kept our community gainfully occupied had almost come to an end but enough employment had not been created yet in the industries to absorb those who were no longer required in town-building activities. We received nearly 500 applications for factory sites at Faridabad and we calculated that we needed less than 100 of these factories to absorb the 8,000 workers of the community. But our Financial Adviser, the representative of the Finance Ministry on our Board, insisted on such high prices for the factory plots that with the exception of a few very rich companies like the Bata Shoe Company, the applicants could not afford to pay such large sums of money. For most of the applicants were refugee industrialists who had lost their capital in Pakistan but possessed the will and the talent to rebuild their industries in India again. I pleaded that these industrialists should be required to pay only reasonable sums as cash down for their leases and as they created employment and made

money we could raise our annual rents on the factory sites and we could revise the terms of the lease every ten or fifteen years. I pointed out that the Bata Shoe factory alone was paying Government 50,000 rupees per day in excise taxes on the 50,000 pairs of shoes they produced every day and that was the way to make money from industries and not through large sums as cash down in the initial stages. But my pleading was of no avail and during the period of hiatus we had to secure employment for our workers in adjoining areas, including Delhi itself, and even to spend money on doles for those who were rendered unemployed during the transition period. The plan for the development of the surrounding 200 villages was just touched upon; only one out of the thirty 'mother villages' had started work.

While we were struggling with these problems misfortune overtook us because of the fame Faridabad had acquired. The name of Faridabad had spread far and wide, as this touching letter from an unknown woman from a remote Swiss village written in broken English shows:

*CHERNEX 10.XII.1951*

*Madame R. Schaerer*

*Les Iris*

*To*

*Mr. Sudhir Ghosh,*

*Faridabad near Delhi*

Dear Sir,

In a swiss illustradet news-paper, is a wonderful article about the town, you have built on your own, that you have done from a dream town, a real town, for 50,000 persons, a town, in which everybody is happy, has work, health, and shool. I come to congratued you, you have done a tremendes work. I wish you from all hart, a good health, that you may help more and more your dear country, which I love also. May God bless you, and your helpers, and I am

Yours sincerely,

(MRS.) R. SCHAERER

The significance of our work not only touched simple people like this unknown woman in a distant country but powerfully moved highly sophisticated men, toughened by political and administrative experience, like the American Ambassador to India, Mr. Chester Bowles, as indicated by this letter which he left for me when he went back to America after his first term as Ambassador in India:

*American Embassy  
New Delhi, India, March 10, 1953*

Dear Sudhir,

I feel badly at the thought of leaving India before your return, but I am afraid that there is not much that we can do about it. We leave about the 20th of March by way of the Pacific. We are making many stops and I do not believe we will be back in the United States before early May.

I only hope that you realize what a very high regard both Steb and I have for you and Shanti and we will always remember vividly our first trip to Faridabad. Indeed, it was on that day that I began to realize the tremendous potentialities of the Indian people. Since that time you have been a consistent help to me in setting up our work and avoiding some of the less obvious pitfalls. I shall always be in your debt.

I do hope that on your return you will find the kind of assignment which is in line with your very great talents. I have been wondering if possibly the best bet isn't somewhere in the United Nations. Perhaps you have considered this possibility while you were in New York.

Do let me hear from you when you get a chance. Our address will be Essex, Connecticut.

With our warmest regards and best wishes,

Sincerely,

CHET

(CHESTER BOWLES)

But this American interest created a problem for Faridabad. Ambassador Bowles brought into Indo-American relations a breath of fresh air when he came to India in October, 1951.



My warm friend, Mr. Casey, who was then Australian External Affairs Minister, passed through New Delhi towards the end of October. He told me that he knew the newly-arrived American Ambassador and had told him that the Ambassador and I should know each other. A few days later Ambassador Bowles, whom I had never met before, telephoned to ask if he and his wife could come and spend the day with us at Faridabad. The informality of the Ambassador was charmingly refreshing. The letter quoted above shows what Faridabad did to him. My friendship with this fellow-enthusiast progressed very rapidly and, as desired by my friend, Mr. Casey, I helped the Ambassador with whatever advice I could give him to set up his work in a country where he was a stranger.

By this time I had upset a whole line of vested interests by the demonstration I was making at Faridabad. In the early stages of Faridabad the powerful civil servants and public works organization of the Government did not bother much about what I was doing. They thought I was going to burn my fingers by trying to get a refugee community to build a town with their own hands. But, after all, I had not asked for more money than they were going to spend on giving food and shelter to these refugees for three years and if I made a mess of it all, it was, they thought, the fellow's own funeral. But after two years' work my fellow workers and I turned Faridabad into a powerful instrument which provoked a great deal of thinking in and outside India on how to find a way of developing the vast rural areas of underdeveloped Asia and Africa as self-financing and self-perpetuating investments. To demonstrate that a two-room little brick-cement house, with a bathing place and a lavatory, however modest in size, could be built at an atrociously low cost of Rs.1,933 was highly offensive to the public works organization at the Central and the State Government level.

Not what was done but how it was done was the exciting thing about Faridabad. I had not only got together an autonomous authority but made its autonomy real by getting Mr. Nehru personally involved in it. Any decision of our little Board was a decision with which the Prime Minister of the

country was associated and neither civil servants nor even the Minister dared to upset it. Normally the method by which the bureaucracy of the Government (who are the real power holders in a country like India) destroys the autonomy of an autonomous organization is to put in it a representative of the Ministry of Finance who claims that he is not only one of the many members of the authority but the member who is to decide whether a decision of the authority with a financial implication should or should not go through. In other words he claims the power to veto any financial decision. For is he not the custodian of public money? The combined wisdom of the rest of all the members of the authority is considered less dependable than the wisdom of one man. For the first time, in the affairs of the Government of India, this traditional claim of the bureaucracy was frustrated. I was not forgiven for it.

In the British days there was a basic presumption, in the rules and regulations for the drawing and disbursing of public funds, that every man was a thief and rules had to be thief-proof. This was all right when functions of Government were restricted to collection of land revenue and maintenance of what was called law and order and bits of public works. The expenditure involved was tiny compared to the magnitude of Government expenditure in a supposedly Welfare State struggling to build up a new life for its people. The purpose of Government has undergone revolutionary changes in India and yet the nature of the Government's machine and the rules according to which it functions are exactly as they were in the nineteenth century. One way of solving this problem is to create autonomous authorities, to do those jobs which are different in nature from the normal jobs of Government. But all attempts to make autonomous authorities honestly autonomous have so far failed in India without one exception. In this instance I succeeded for nearly three years as I interposed myself between those in the Government machine who seek power minus the responsibility of proving a case and those who were working at Faridabad and for whom I created a state of affairs in which they could function with enthusiasm. But the collective inertia of the

bureaucratic machine of Government is so powerful that anybody who seriously makes such an attempt comes to grief sooner or later. So did I. The weakness of the situation was that I could survive only so long as Mr. Nehru threw his mantle over me. But as soon as it was withdrawn I could not struggle any further.

The withdrawal of Mr. Nehru's mantle came, strangely enough, through the interest that my American friends showed in the Faridabad experiment. In January 1952 a member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Owen Brewster, visited India. The Senator was a political enemy of Ambassador Bowles and had opposed the Ambassador's appointment to India. The Ambassador, an enthusiastic friend of India, had put forward to the U.S. Administration, for the first time in Indo-American relations, an ambitious programme of American financial and technical assistance to India. When this ambitious programme was presented by the administration to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Committee sent out to India one of its members, Senator Brewster, to find out on the spot what the enthusiastic Ambassador was talking about. Whether the Ambassador's ambitious proposal for assistance to India was going to get Congressional support or not depended mainly on the support of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and their support depended, in turn, on what sort of report Senator Brewster was going to give them on return to Washington.

Ambassador Bowles's main interest was community development, meaning a combination of agricultural extension service together with welfare projects of health and education on a large scale in Indian villages, and he had the problem of satisfying the visiting American Senator about the soundness of his programme. So the Ambassador sent the Senator down to Faridabad one bright winter morning in a shining American limousine to see the significance of what the Indians themselves were doing to build a new life for their people without any American assistance. I received the distinguished Senator in my little tin hut and proceeded to explain, with my customary enthusiasm, our plans for building the Faridabad community. I

found the Senator cold and quite unresponsive. Ambassador Bowles had warned me that the visitor was a hard-boiled American businessman who made millions in oil.

But a miracle happened in that tin hut that morning. The Senator who was hardly listening to my exposition of the Faridabad Project suddenly interrupted me and pointed his finger to an attractive photograph\* on the wall behind me, of an old man and a young man, the young man talking earnestly to the old man, and said, 'That's Gandhi? And that's you with Gandhi? You knew Gandhi?' 'Yes, Senator,' I said, 'I worked with him. He was a father to me.' The expression on the Senator's face changed immediately and he asked me a whole series of questions about Gandhiji. 'Tell me, what was he really like?' asked the Senator. He was full of curiosity. To satisfy his curiosity I talked to him at some length about Gandhi instead of talking about Faridabad. I showed him a number of letters written to me by Gandhiji in his own hand about matters of moment. The Senator ended his enthusiastic discussion with the remark, 'Well, my friend, even in my part of the world we felt the impact of his personality.' Coming from the hard-boiled American businessman it was a pleasant surprise.

The Senator became a transformed man. He spent the whole day with us; saw everything with deep interest, had lunch and tea and talked charmingly to my wife and at the end of the day when he left he said: 'Well, my friend, I kinda like you. I hope we shall meet again. What you are doing makes sense to me.' So I asked him in what ways our experiment made sense to the Senator. He said, 'You know, my friend, I am a businessman. I am not like your friend, Bowles. I do not believe in giving away large quantities of American money to all sorts of people in the world. But here you have taken about five million dollars worth of money from the Indian Treasury which would have been wasted in charity on these people anyhow. You have invested this money on the work of these people and have thus built up a town which, quite apart from any other consideration, is worth, merely as a piece of real estate, several times the five million dollars and if you can

\* The photograph is printed on the jacket of this book.

complete your work, as I am sure you will do, your investment will give you an annual return out of which a part will amortize your debt and the other part could keep the services going. If anybody is prepared to accept 500 million dollars on this basis and do 100 such units, in this country or in any other underdeveloped country, I, Brewster, will support such a proposal of giving 500 million dollars of American money, without the least hesitation. I do not believe in charity. It makes no sense to me.'

So the Senator went back to Delhi and the Ambassador was amazed to see the impact of Faridabad on him. A man who came to scoff stayed to admire. The upshot of the Brewster visit was that he reported to his colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington that it would be worth their while to get me to go to Washington to discuss with them informally how this job of self-financing development activity could be multiplied in underdeveloped countries. They arranged with the U.S. State Department and the American Ambassador for me to be invited to pay a visit to the United States in April 1952 to see something of the extensive American agricultural extension services and projects like the T.V.A. and incidentally meet the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee informally in Washington.

But this deeply upset Mr. Nehru. It is not that he did not want American money but his attitude towards American assistance was very complex. He not only wanted American money but wanted it in large quantities for India's development. But he did not want any Indian associated with his Government to make any kind of effort to persuade the Americans to assist India. It was for the United States to come and offer American assistance to the Government of India and it was for the Government graciously to accept it. He was prepared, when he was in a good mood, even to say thank you. I have never been able to understand why Americans and Indians cannot talk to each other like adults in the matter of American assistance to India. The official Indian position is that the Government of India never makes a request for American assistance and the official American position is that

it is illegal for the United States Government to give even one dollar to India without an official request from the Indian Government. In spite of these difficulties, both sides have successfully managed to transfer from the one to the other more than 6,000 million dollars worth of aid. It is a charming little game that the Indians and Americans play with each other.

However, the effect of the American invitation to me and my acceptance of it was that Fardidabad was destroyed. As it was I had already upset a whole lot of powerful civil servants and the Refugee Minister by my demonstration. The Faridabad experiment seemed to have more kudos in it than the Minister's own job. He was trying unsuccessfully to dislodge me. My decision to go on this trip to the United States gave the Minister and the civil servants their chance. Mr. Nehru's suspicion about the American motive behind the invitation appeared to me unworthy and I said so. There was an unpleasant exchange of words over it. Mr. Nehru took the position that I could go to the United States on such an invitation only as a non-official person unconnected with the Government (since then many hundreds of Government officials have been to the United States on such invitations). In a huff I resigned and made myself a non-official person and went to the United States on 18th April 1952. My visit and the long series of talks I had not only in Washington but in many different parts of the country with leading men in many walks of life—Universities, the Press, local authorities—no doubt made an impact on American opinion, as this editorial in the *New York Times* dated 13th May 1952 indicates:

#### AID FOR INDIA

'Congress gets so much abuse from all sides when the time comes to work out appropriations, grants and loans for foreign countries that it would be unfair to withhold praise when it is due. So far as India is concerned both houses and many individual Congressmen are showing a proper awareness of the problems involved and of the role that the United States can play. This sympathy and understanding have yet to be fully implemented, but with the Administration and so many Congressmen realizing what needs to be done, and why, there is every reason for hopefulness.

'In its major aspect what the West faces is the same challenge of Communism that we all failed to meet in China. Paul G. Hoffman, in his speech to the Overseas Press Club last Wednesday, suggested that if the United States had spent one billion dollars in rural aid for China at the end of the war instead of investing billions in arms alone China might have been saved.

'The time to help India is now, and the place is in the countryside, in such rural development projects as the sensationally successful Faridabad, about which this newspaper published a story yesterday. Sudhir Ghosh, the impressive young Gandhist, who is in the United States now explaining his project, has proved that with a little aid and a lot of hard work and faith by Indians, rural India can be transformed in five or six years.

'Congress is allotting \$115,000,000 to India in the Mutual Security Act bill now under discussion. This amount is needed too badly to suffer the overall slash of 12 per cent that has been proposed. But what is much more important is an additional grant of \$125,000,000 this year for food grains. Southern India—where communism has made greatest strides—is again facing famine because of continued drought. A few million tons of grain, which are available here, would tide the population over this year, while proceeds from the sales in rupee can be applied to rural development.

'This is the next goal, and Congress should pass a special bill for these food grains before it adjourns in June. The Administration will surely support such a measure. This is the sort of enlightened self-interest and idealism that has made the right sort of history since the war—and paid dividends, to boot.'

My efforts certainly helped to create a climate of opinion favourable for U.S. assistance to India. India got the first 50 million dollars of U.S. assistance. But upon my return to India in June 1952 I found that the effect of it on Faridabad and on my personal fortunes were devastating. As soon as the Nehru mantle was withdrawn from me Faridabad collapsed. A genuine bureaucrat was imported from Bombay to 'clean up' Faridabad and the following brief financial statement produced by the Government gives a picture of how effectively he 'liquidated' Faridabad.

*Final costs and liquidation of loan to the Faridabad Board*

<i>Head of Expenditure</i>	<i>Original Estimate</i>	<i>Final Estimate</i>
1. Survey, Demarcation and acquisition of land	1,565,000	3,202,000
2. Buildings	10,800,000	12,374,000
3. Electricity (Production & distribution)	2,368,000	5,255,000
4. Roads and tree plantation	925,000	1,634,000
5. Water supply & drainage	3,502,000	3,725,000
6. Nissen Huts for temporary office and other accommodation	330,000	660,000
7. Establishment, Contingencies	995,000	1,463,000
8. Incentive bonus to workers (subsidy)	1,400,000	1,600,000
9. Railway siding & level crossings	365,000	1,145,000
10. Technical Training Centre	1,547,000	4,161,000
11. Tools & tackle	115,000	247,000
12. Development of sites for houses (other than refugee houses)	—	169,000
13. Loans to Co-operatives	1,450,000	2,400,000
14. Stock suspense	—	1,600,000
15. Development of unused land	—	583,000
16. Unforeseen Items	—	50,000
17. Fire Station	—	300,000
Total:—	<u>25,451,000</u>	<u>40,628,000</u>

*Liquidation of the loan of Rs.40,628,000*

(a) Repaid to Government (including amounts adjusted against refugee claims respecting property left in Pakistan)	25,684,000
(b) Amounts due from Government Departments and private parties (for the sale of the Power House [partly gift] to the Punjab State Government and the plant, and machinery of the diesel engine factory to private parties)	3,922,000
(c) Amounts converted as Government Grants (roads and drainage, water works system, Hospitals, Schools, Power House [partly gift], Fire Station, Technical Centre—all taken over by the Punjab State Government)	<u>11,022,000</u>
Total:	<u>40,628,000</u>



Many of the refugees were entitled to get compensation from Government for the homes and land they left behind in Pakistan. Against the amounts due to those who were entitled to such compensation the Government sold the houses at Rs.5,000 each (they were certainly worth that money) although the cost at which we built them was Rs.1,933 each. The Government Power Plant was given to the Punjab State Government partly as a gift and partly on payment. The plant and machinery of the Community's diesel engine factory were sold to a private party. The Hospital, Health Centres, School, the Water Works system were handed to the Punjab State Government (in whose territory Faridabad was located) as gifts. After having thus liquidated the entire loan of Rs.40,628,000 (the cost of feeding the refugee community for three years would have been Rs.43,200,000) the Government of India were left with 2,500 houses (allotted to refugees who were not entitled to compensation) and 250 acres of unused developed land worth over Rs.2,500,000.

Looking back I often wonder if my enthusiasm about the Americans was worth the cost. American interest in India's economic development was, of course, a matter of crucial importance. And my effort certainly helped to break the ice. I did blaze a trail. But fourteen years of hindsight makes me feel that my row with Mr. Nehru, however irrational his suspicion about the Americans, was a major blunder. For, after all, the American assistance, however crucial its importance, was far less important than the proving of my case in the Faridabad experiment. And perhaps Mr. Nehru's calculation was right that American economic and technical assistance for India did not require any persuasion by any Indian. Mr. Nehru was taken aback because he never thought that I would be prepared to resign and give up all the kudos I was getting as a pioneer. I was surprised because I did not think that his wrath would be so enduring that he would rather see the Faridabad experiment (on which he lavished so much of his time and care) destroyed than let me go back, after a couple of months' absence, to complete my work and to prove my case. He was a very magnanimous man who, on occasions, would act like an

elephant which did not forget. I suppose every human being is a mixture. And he was no exception.

For three whole years I could do nothing in India because the story had gone round that the boss was against me. I filled in my time by doing an assignment for the United Nations in South America as U.N. 'expert' in Community Development and did various odds and ends including a visit to Japan, in 1954, in response to an invitation from Japanese Pacifists to attend the World Pacifist Conference in Tokyo which gave me the chance to see something of Japanese economic reconstruction from the Kiyushu Island in the south to Hokkaido in the north. On my way back from the trip to South America I stopped over in Washington at the invitation of Senator Hubert Humphrey (at present Vice-President of the U.S.), Senator Alexander Smith (former Princeton Professor of Political Science) and some other members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee who had developed a sense of confidence in me as a result of my meetings with them in 1952. The substance of the discussion that they raised was that there was a growing sense of disenchantment in the minds of American Congressional leaders about the distribution of American money in underdeveloped countries. It was not that they expected a lot of gratitude from the recipients. What bothered them was the unpleasant fact that while all underdeveloped countries, including India, were only too willing to receive American money no one seemed to have so far devised a way of using American money in underdeveloped countries which amounted to an answer to any country's problems. Did I have any idea to contribute or any advice to give them?

I told them that I did not have a full answer to their big question but I was interested to see only four experiments carried out, one in Latin America, one in Africa and two in South East Asia, particularly Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia in self-financing and self-perpetuating development of large rural communities. Would they be interested in giving an extra sum of twenty million dollars to the U.N. Technical Assistance Board to implement four such demonstration projects? They were sceptical about the ability of the U.N.T.A.B. to use

money as a revolving fund from which capital was to be advanced to these projects and invested in such a manner that the communities could not only produce more wealth out of its investment on their land and labour but could gradually repay the loan with nominal interest or no interest to the Central Fund, which could be used over and over again. The politicians pointed out that international bureaucracy was worse than national bureaucracy; the U.N. Technical Assistance programme then was the collection of a paltry sum of sixty million dollars a year of which the Americans contributed 60 per cent and it was distributed in bits and pieces all over the under-developed countries, and whereas the name of U.N. had prestige their Technical Assistance programme was so spotty that, with the exception of a few projects of W.H.O. to eradicate yaws or malaria, the rest left no impact of any significance. However, I pleaded that our American friends must learn to give without appearing to be the givers.

To my surprise the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee not only agreed but officially put in a paragraph in their report on the Mutual Security Act 1953 urging the President of the United States to give an additional sum of twenty million dollars (in addition to their normal contribution to the U.N. Technical Assistance Fund) to the U.N.T.A.B. to implement four projects of the kind I advocated. Senator Alexander Smith who sponsored the proposal wrote to me to say:

*United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
June 18, 1953*

My dear Mr. Ghosh:

By this time you know the action of the Foreign Relations Committee in connection with your experiments with the self-liquidating rural development projects.

It was the hope of some of us that we might get a special reference to these projects in the legislation itself, but I think probably the conclusion was wise in leaving the matter entirely up to the Mutual Security Administrator, and referring to the whole project in the report of the Committee. This will

certainly give a backing to the Administrator in making some of the experiments in which you are so much interested, and I hope a program can be worked out.

Always cordially yours

H. ALEXANDER SMITH

The result was that the State Department officials were up in arms against me. Was I not putting into the heads of the powerful American Senators bad ideas? If these projects succeeded and their political masters got accustomed to giving American money to the underdeveloped countries through the U.N. what would happen to the money-giving programmes of the American officials? American officials love nothing better than to play the role of money-givers. Curiously enough the American officials who were deeply disturbed by my 'unfriendly' activities (a year ago they found me very friendly because I persuaded their politicians to give more and more money to India which suited the money-givers) got into touch with their Indian counterparts. The permanent Indian representative at the United Nations, a civil servant of outstanding ability and a warm friend of mine, came running along to me in New York and said, 'What the hell are you doing, Sudhir? Do you realize that once these American Senators get used to giving their money to the U.N. they will not give us a sou?'

It is an interesting phenomenon of India-America relations that the officials of the Indian Government not only want more and more American money but they prefer to have it direct from the American officials. They don't like American money to be channelled through the U.N., because the American officials can be told to keep off the grass; they dare not interfere with the use of the money; but the U.N. can claim to participate in the work of using the money. Doesn't the World Bank send every winter a bunch of interfering international civil servants who sit in judgement over the Indian officials and look into what kind of use had been made of their money and whether investments are sound or unsound and how much is left unused and why? It is a nuisance to put up with all that.

The American officials can be told to mind their own business and not to interfere. They dare not do otherwise. So givers and receivers of American money have a vested interest in bilateral agreements. No wonder, therefore, that the State Department officials were out for my blood!

But the public reaction to my proposal was surprisingly friendly as this encouraging editorial in the widely circulated daily, the *Minneapolis Star*, dated 29th August 1953 indicates:

#### AN ECONOMIC PLAN THAT DESERVES US SUPPORT

'A young Indian, a former close associate of Gandhi, has a new idea for promoting economic progress in underdeveloped countries (and for winning the cold war for the democracies) which deserves a full-scale trial. The idea is to set up several comprehensive pilot projects for community development in key low-income areas—such as south-east Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

'Sudhir Ghosh, the originator of the plan, has some evidence that it works. Three years ago he set up a development project for the city of Faridabad, India, which has made outstanding progress. Faridabad is a tent city of 40,000 refugees south of New Delhi. Ghosh convinced Premier Nehru that it was better to spend money toward helping the refugees become self-supporting than just for relief.

'He got a 5-million-dollar loan from the Indian Government. Homes have been erected, along with schools, hospitals and factories. Already the community has started to repay the loan. The next phase will be developing water resources to boost agricultural production in the surrounding area.

'Ghosh wants the US senate to earmark part of the Mutual Security Administration's funds for projects of this kind. Several senators have taken an interest in the idea, and Iowa's senators Hickenlooper and Gillette are enthusiastic about it. Both Hickenlooper and Gillette visited India in the last year and saw the progress achieved at Faridabad.

'Ghosh's plan calls for investment funds to be distributed through the technical assistance board of the United Nations. Direction of the projects would be by nearly autonomous boards in the communities. Each board would include representatives of the United States, the United Nations and the government of the country in which the projects were located.

'America's technical assistance program (Point Four) has been slow getting under way, mainly because it has been so difficult to find educational techniques that would work in underdeveloped countries. For the most part, Point Four leaders have tried to transplant American methods, especially those of the federal-state Extension service. But in many places these methods have not succeeded well.

'Using ordinary Extension methods, foreign technical assistance has often been spread so thin that it carried no visible impact to the natives. The Ghosh plan has the merit of a demonstration that can show quick results and encourage other communities.

'Technical assistance alone without extra capital investment is a very slow process. The Ghosh plan offers a way of combining education and the infusion of new capital, without the stigma of "imperialist exploitation".

'Carrying out the program through the United Nations would help avoid this charge. The strong feeling against "colonialism" is one of the greatest handicaps to economic development in underdeveloped areas—and a great advantage to Communist propaganda. It is for this reason that the Ghosh plan has such strong appeal. It is the idea of an Indian; it would be carried out by the UN; it would not bear the label of U.S. "dollar imperialism".

'We hope congress and the administration will allocate a part of MSA funds to the Ghosh plan, on a trial basis. This might well prove to be the best investment for national security in the whole list of such investments we are making these days.'

In India no less a man than the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, tried very hard to persuade Mr. Nehru to let me carry out in a remote corner of the country, Chamapran district in Dr. Rajendra Prasad's home state of Bihar, a demonstration of what I was talking about. On 27th August 1953 he wrote to Mr. Nehru:

*Rashtrapati Bhavan,  
New Delhi  
27th August, 1953*

My dear Prime Minister,

I have taken an informal interest in a project for comprehensive industrial and agricultural development of a rural district in one of our States which Sudhir Ghosh placed before me some

time ago. The central idea of the project is to demonstrate that this matter of raising the productive capacity and living standards of rural communities can really be a self-supporting and self-perpetuating proposition. If we take a large part of a district consisting of about 500 villages and approximately half a million population and half a million acres of land, it is proposed to prove that by throwing into such a community some initiative from outside and by infusing into it a sufficient volume of capital for the promotion of village industries and intensive agricultural work, the wealth-producing activities can be fostered so appreciably in three or four years that out of the increased income of the community itself all the welfare services of health, education etc., can be paid for (without depending on the revenues of the State Government) and the capital can gradually be put back into the Fund created for this purpose.

The scheme of work briefly is to organize for a unit of about 500 villages

1. Cooperatives to produce sufficient water by digging canals or drilling tubewells and by equipping surface wells with pumping equipment and by other means for the 500,000 acres of land so that two crops and a variety of crops are produced in a year instead of one crop as is the case in most areas.
2. Cooperatives for the purchase and distribution of better seeds as well as the production of high quality seeds in a number of seed farms;
3. Cooperatives for the production of fertilizers in a small factory as well as purchase and distribution of fertilizers;
4. Cooperatives for improving the cattle wealth of the villages through cattle-breeding farms in different key villages of the district and through the use of modern methods of veterinary science;
5. Cooperatives for one or more small-scale factories for the manufacture of improved agricultural implements;
6. Cooperatives for one or more small-scale engineering workshops to train village boys to be artisans;
7. Cooperatives for organising small-scale village industries such as a furniture factory, timber treatment factory, small weaving mills, pottery works and other small industries together with a

group of large-scale industries such as a sugar mill or a chemical plant and other factories suitable to the different localities for the purpose of absorbing the workers who are surplus on the land;

8. Cooperatives for the afforestation of suitable areas and the use of the special knowledge of experts from other countries for this purpose;

9. Cooperatives for the construction of rural houses by using available local raw materials in more sanitary conditions;

10. Cooperatives of the villagers to provide themselves with adequate health attention through a general hospital and a number of health centres, with a vigorous programme for population control.

11. Cooperatives of the villagers to provide their children with a rural type of education through a number of Basic Schools and trade schools;

12. Cooperatives for the preservation and further promotion of village culture including folk dances, folk songs, folk drama and other forms of folk art which make village life colourful.

Once a district is selected, the details of what industries can be organized there can easily be worked out with the help of competent industrialists. Sudhir Ghosh proposes to develop a large part of the district of Champaran in North Bihar. There is ample room for agricultural and industrial development in the district where such a scheme will be a great help to the local population who are suffering today from the problem of unemployment and numerous other troubles.

It will not be necessary for the Central Government or the State Government concerned to contribute any part of the necessary capital or the annual recurring expenses for the scheme. Sudhir Ghosh tells me that whatever capital is necessary for the project will be found by the UN Technical Assistance Board who will receive the capital from the foreign aid funds of the USA; but the USA will not participate in the execution of the project in any way. The capital will be turned into a Fund in the project area and will be placed at the disposal of a Trust consisting of:



1. a nominee of the State Government to be Chairman (Dr. Syed Mahmud is the suggested Chairman).
2. a capable industrialist to be nominated by the State Government.
3. a nominee of the UN Technical Assistance Board (an Indian national).

The Trust will function as an autonomous body free to devise ways of executing the project in a business-like way and not a bureaucratic way. The State Government will have control over it in the sense that two of the three members of the Trust are its nominees and can be removed if the autonomous body does not function to the satisfaction of the Government; the UNTAB will have a share of control in the sense that one of the members will be its nominee and can be removed by it. But it is essential that the day-to-day work of the body is not subjected to the bureaucratic control of the normal agencies of Government. The personnel employed by the autonomous body will naturally be almost wholly Indian, but some international personnel, such as experts in cooperatives from Scandinavia and other places may be imported.

Personally I shall be pleased to see a proof of the case that all-round development of life, economic and social, of a rural district can be accomplished as a completely self-supporting and self-liquidating proposition without any element of charity being introduced into it. I see no objection to such a project being encouraged. I wonder what you think of it.

Yours sincerely,

RAJENDRA PRASAD

*Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru,  
Prime Minister*

The project was not to cost the Government of India or the Bihar Government a penny. But the combined effort of President Rajendra Prasad and Dr. Syed Mahmud, a former Bihar Minister and one of the closest friends of Mr. Nehru, could not soften Mr. Nehru.

Sir V. T. Krishnamachari, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, who was the father of the Community

Development Programme in India, was the staunchest opponent of what I advocated. Sir V. T. Krishnamachari contended that such comprehensive development of rural communities in underdeveloped countries could never be self-financing. It was no use arguing with him that whether the case could or could not be proved should be judged only by the results of an actual demonstration. What did he lose if somebody carried out a demonstration to see whether it succeeded or failed? Was he afraid that I might succeed after all? It was not a question of whether your argument was sound or unsound. It was a question of whether the boss was for you or against you.

In 1952-3 Sir V. T. Krishnamachari worked out his idea of community development, the revolutionary programme which was to change the face of India's 550,000 villages, on which we have so far invested Rs.720 crores (equivalent of 1,400 million dollars). Mr. B. G. Kher, a saint amongst politicians, who was Chief Minister of Bombay went with me to Sir V. T. Krishnamachari to argue our case against the kind of community development Sir V. T. proposed for India. Mr. Kher pointed out to Sir V. T. that the normal machinery of a State Government could not do justice to a programme like this; even in Bombay where Mr. Kher had a civil service which was perhaps better than that of any other State he felt he could not implement such a programme. For the work was basically different in nature from what the public works-cum-revenue collecting machinery of a State Government is accustomed to. We pleaded that the Government of India should not create a Ministry for this work, because a Ministry always becomes a vested interest of politicians as well as civil servants; once you create a ministry it becomes difficult to dismantle it. And after all the actual work was in the States; the Centre's job was merely to distribute the resources and keep an eye on the programme.

Mr. Kher and I suggested that we should create a Fund, managed by a Trust or Foundation which would advance the necessary capital to the projects all over India on the understanding that the capital was to be repaid over twenty to twenty-five years, with nominal interest or no interest. There

should be an autonomous authority at the District level consisting of an M.P., the Collector of the district and the Project Officer to administer the projects. Such boards should be responsible either through the State Development Minister to the State Legislature or to Parliament—preferably Parliament—through the Planning Minister who should make himself the father protector of their autonomy instead of grudging their independence. Let there be a Committee of Parliament to watch the progress of these autonomous bodies. If we were out to build up democracy we should curb the tendency of concentrating power in the hands of a few in New Delhi. In our development programmes the philosophy of Statism was becoming much too prominent; distribution of power was the lifeblood of democracy. Gandhiji wanted to build up a Co-operative Commonwealth in rural India based on the twin philosophies of decentralisation of authority and self-help. He believed that to the extent the people of India were enabled to do things for themselves independently of the Government—to that extent India was free.

But all these pleadings made no impression on Sir V. T. Krishnamachari, the ablest and most eminent bureaucrat India ever produced; he insisted that if the normal machinery of a State Government could not carry out these projects then they were not worth doing. Instead of building up a rural development programme of indigenous growth, Government built up something which was, basically, an imitation of the American concept of an agricultural extension service. There is in the United States an institution, called the County Agent, around whom is built a service which does a vigorous job of selling new and fruitful ideas to the American farmers. In the U.S. once the farmer accepts the ideas of the County Agent it is no problem for him to implement them; he has within easy reach enormous credit and easy supplies. These two ingredients are conspicuous by their absence in the circumstances of the Indian cultivator. What he is interested in is the organized infusion of capital (no part of it need be given as charity) which makes it possible for him to secure water, fertilizer, better seeds and better cattle on terms that he can

afford—and not in preachings about a new way of life or ephemeral bits of welfare work which die out after a time.

Instead of making available to the villagers adequate organized credit on easy terms or reliable supplies the Government worked out, in the first stage of the revolution to change the face of India, a project of 300 villages, 600 miles of mud roads (most of which would be washed away in the rainy season), eighty Lower Schools and five Secondary Schools, three Health Centres and one small ten-bed hospital, but nobody knew who was to pay for the doctors, nurses, teachers and other personnel and the maintenance of these services after the money supply from the Central Government came to an end. In addition there was to be an exhortation programme telling the villagers how to produce more out of their agriculture, how to improve their cottage industries and rural arts and crafts. Thus out of a total provision of Rs.6,500,000 on a community project of 300 villages (about 300,000 population) Rs.3,550,000 was to be spent on educating the villagers in a new way of life and in some welfare services; this amount was charity; the balance of Rs. 2,950,000 was to be invested on minor irrigation works to raise agricultural production; the amount was to be repaid by the State Government to the Centre over twelve years with 3½ per cent interest; the State Government was to charge the people 5 per cent interest. But this was the arrangement for only fifty-five projects, i.e. a total of 16,500 villages out of India's 550,000 villages.

After the first eighteen months' work it was found that the organization for implementing the projects could not spend more than 37 per cent of the money provided for the period. There was then a further process of dilution. On the next lot of projects—eighteen in number—only Rs.4,500,000 per project of 300 villages was to be spent on the same kind of programme. Of this money Rs.2,500,000 was charity and Rs.2,000,000 was to be recovered. Thus a total of 23,900 villages out of India's 550,000 villages were taken care of.

For the balance of India's 526,100 villages the programme was a National Extension Service for a Block of 100 villages (about 100,000 population). On each Block the expenditure

was to be approximately Rs.1,200,000 of which about Rs.400,000 was the administrative cost and the balance of Rs.800,000 was to be invested on the 100 villages; of this amount half was a gift and the other half was to be recovered, i.e. an investment of Rs.4 per head of the population to raise production and Rs.4 per head given in charity for welfare work. Recently I was persuaded by a young Block Development Officer in one of the twenty Blocks of my home district, Purulia, to visit his block to meet his colleagues and the village elders (Panchayat). I see a good deal of these attractive young B.D.O.s of the district (there are twenty of them) because, as Chairman of the Purulia District Development Board, I have used them, over the last five years, for excavating over 500 irrigation tanks (large dug-outs to store rain water during the monsoon, to be used for a second crop in the winter months) by using the labour of unemployed and partly engaged villagers.

The B.D.O. and the village elders explained the details of the welfare work they had done with the Rs.800,000 provided for community of 100 villages over the years. Were they satisfied with the programme? They laughed and, translated into English, what they said in Bengali was 'our good older brother, we are broadcasting puffed rice into the wind'. When you spend limited resources too thinly over too large an area then your investment evaporates into thin air without leaving any enduring impact. You do it for political reasons to show that you have done 'something' for everybody in India. It helps you to get votes but you don't get an answer to your problem. After spending, in the three five-year plans, a total of Rs.720 crores (1,400 million dollars) on community development we find that we have little to show for it. Here and there an occasional enthusiast has made something of it. But by and large the programme is a failure. What is more serious than the loss of money is the people's loss of faith in the Government's will and ability to change the face of rural India. Demands have been made from time to time in Parliament for the abolition of the Ministry of Community Development. This at last happened in January 1966, and whatever could be salvaged out of the wreckage has been added on to the Agriculture Ministry as an

appendage. Thus ended a revolutionary movement which started with a bang and ended in a whimper. Sir V. T. Krishnamachari after retirement in 1962, became a Member of the Upper House of our Parliament. One morning a few months before his death in 1964, we ran into each other in the Lobby of the House. He had just come from a Conference on Community Development. He stopped me abruptly and said: 'You remember, Sudhir, you and I had a fight over the Community Projects back in 1953?' 'Yes, Sir V. T.' I said meckly. 'Well,' said the doyen of the civil servants, 'the whole thing has become damned bureaucratic.' I told Sir V. T. that I was deeply impressed to hear this from the most eminent bureaucrat of India.

The Indian Planning Commission's contention has always been that such rural development projects cannot be and need not be self-supporting; the country, as a whole should be self-supporting and the revenues earned in other departments of the nation's activities should pay for the welfare work in our 550,000 villages. This sounds plausible but not convincing. For, in the first place, 'The country as a whole' is not likely for a very long time to have enough funds to be able to subsidize indefinitely an adequate welfare service all over the country. Secondly, even if this could be done it would involve an excessive centralization of power. The prospect of the entire Indian people being put on doles from New Delhi can be pleasing only to a self-perpetuating bureaucracy.

Long before our American friends brought the community projects to India, some of the progressive British civil servants like F. L. Brayne did very creditable pioneering work in this direction in the Punjab villages. Brayne's work in the Gurgaon district was so impressive that Gandhiji himself wrote in praise of it in his *Young India*. Today Brayne's book can be purchased in the bookshops but there is no trace left of Brayne's work in the village of Gurgaon. What we were looking for and have yet to discover is something that endures. All my attempts during 1952-5 to persuade Mr. Nehru to see this came to nothing. For my personal relationship with him had gone wrong.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Building a Socialist Society*

**A**FTER I spent three years in the wilderness Mr. Nehru relented and I came back to the Government in August 1955. I was given a large share of responsibility for building the Government's steel complex, the giant steel plants at Rourkela, Bhilai and Durgapur, and thus lent a hand in building what Mr. Nehru called a Socialist Society.

If a Socialist Society is to be provided with an adequate economic base public enterprises have to play the role not merely of an investor but also of a creator of resources. If you say this to a Minister or a civil servant in India he looks angry because you are upsetting his pet notion that you get a lot of socialism if a number of large industries are owned by the State and managed by civil servants irrespective of the cost at which the products are made available to the people or what return the investment yields. India has so far invested Rs.2,000 crores (equivalent of 4,000 million dollars) on State-owned industries (apart from the railways which we inherited from our British predecessors), and the average return from this investment is 2½ per cent as against an average of 23 per cent earned by private enterprises. If you point out that unless you can raise the 2½ per cent to something like 15 per cent you cannot build much of a socialist society in India, then you are not going to be very popular either with the politicians or with officials in power. You are being difficult and demanding. Many 'progressive' politicians in India even point out that there is no reason why public enterprises should make any profit at all. Aren't State-owned industries similar to public utilities, such as water supply, for instance, under a municipality? If one of the industrial commissars of Soviet Russia took this position he

would soon come to grief because even in a Communist Society there is no yardstick by which an industrial investment is judged except its profitability. But our social philosophers are much more advanced!

I saw a great deal of this kind of philosophy of socialism while I put my blood and sweat into the Government's steel complex for five years, from 1955-60. It was depressing to see this excuse for incompetence. And yet it was exciting to be associated with the building of a giant million-ton steel plant from the day the first sod was cut on a barren piece of land, and the building of a new town for 100,000 people around it. It was fascinating to work simultaneously with three groups of foreigners: Germans, who built the Rourkela Steel Plant in Orissa; the Russians who built the Bhilai Steel Plant in Central India; and the British who built the Durgapur Steel Plant in West Bengal. For the three lots of them were very different from each other.

The Germans in Rourkela had all sorts of trouble. They were the first in the field. Their arrangement with us was that the famous German steel-makers, Krupps, and machine-builders, Demag, got together to form a Company which entered into an agreement with Hindustan Steel, the Indian Government's steel corporation, to provide all necessary technical advice both in the purchase of the plant and machinery and also in their erection at the site. The job of building the entire complex was divided between thirty-three different German firms each of whom entered into a separate contract with Hindustan Steel to build a unit, such as the coke ovens, the blast furnaces, the steel melting shops, the rolling mills or the services of electricity and water and the maintenance departments. There were all kinds of delays in the erection of the different bits and pieces and when they were all put together there were all kinds of troubles in their operation.

Steel-making is like cooking. There is nothing automatic about it. You cannot just switch on a steel plant and expect steel in different shapes and sizes to come out of it. As in cooking you try and try again until you get used to the working of the plant and machinery and their working becomes normal.



It takes up to five years for a steel complex to reach its rated production capacity. The period varies from place to place according to the skill with which the erection job is done and the quality of the operation personnel who take over.

The Krupp-Demag people were very unhappy about the blame they got as a result of all the troubles of the Rourkela Steel Plant. Although the work at Rourkela started in 1952 and the erection of the Russian Plant started in Bhilai in 1955 the two of them went into production simultaneously in 1958. The Russian Plant was free from trouble from the very day it went into production. The erection of the Durgapur Steel Plant was started in 1956 and it went into production in 1960. Its British builders had much less trouble than the troubles of the Germans at Rourkela. How was it that the Russians were so successful and got such a lot of kudos while the Germans and the British did not get nearly as much credit for their work as the Russians did? It is an interesting question. A blast furnace made in Soviet Russia is exactly the same as a blast furnace made in Germany or Britain or the United States. The plant, machinery and equipment supplied by West Germany was first-rate and just as modern as anything used in any steel plant in any part of the world. Indeed the mills supplied by the Germans were much more sophisticated than the mills at Bhilai and Durgapur. For in Rourkela we had planned to produce all the flat products, plates and sheets, and the Germans erected for us the most modern hot strip mill and cold-rolling mills in Asia. For steel-making at Rourkela we had adopted the new Austrian L.D. (Lintz & Donawitz) process of blowing oxygen through hot metal in a vessel instead of the traditional open-hearth for melting pig iron with scrap, which we adopted in Durgapur and Bhilai.

But what went wrong was that the job of building the steel complex was divided between thirty-three different contractors and the job of taking work from each of the contracting German firms and co-ordinating the work of all of them was the responsibility of the Indian Managing Director, who fell down on the job. But the general impression in the country was that somehow the Germans had let us down. Mr. Alfred Krupp, head

of Krupp's, bitterly told me in one of my meetings with him that we blamed his firm for not discharging a responsibility which they were never given. For our contract with Krupp-Demag was that they were to give our organization all the technical advice that we asked for but not to co-ordinate the work of the thirty-three German contractors. The award of the contract in bits and pieces to so many firms was, of course, perfectly intelligent because that way a large sum of money could be saved. But this argument would be valid only if Indian co-ordination and supervision was effective, which it was not. Hence the disappointment and resentment of the Germans. After learning from the unhappy experience of the Germans, the British took the contract for building the entire steel complex at Durgapur as one undivided job and they distributed the work amongst the members of the British Consortium as an internal arrangement, so that the co-ordination was entirely a British responsibility.

In Bhilai the situation was different because the contractor was the U.S.S.R. Government. They took the job as one undivided whole. From the writing of the project report to the erection of every bit of the plant and machinery and putting them into commission was the undivided responsibility of one top Russian technical boss. The degree of importance the Soviet Government attached to the Bhilai Steel Plant could be judged by the fact that a man of the stature of V. I. Dymshits, who upon completion of the Bhilai job was appointed as one of the Soviet Deputy Prime Ministers, was deputed to Bhilai for this prestige job. The Russians sent to Bhilai the best of their men and the best of their plant, machinery and equipment. Eleven hundred engineers and technicians, the best of Russia's steel plant erectors were selected from all over the country and sent out to India. This meant the housing of 1,100 Russian families in Bhilai, a barren piece of land where we started building the steel plant. They behaved extremely well in spite of the gruelling heat of Central India in the summer months. They lived simply. There was not one occasion when we had to be bothered about an unpleasant incident. The Germans on the other hand got into trouble now and then by paying attention to the women

of the aboriginal community in Rourkela. The British at Durgapur were very respectable; their only trouble was that the Resident Director of the British Consortium was a retired army Brigadier, formerly of the Military Engineering Service of India; a singularly unimaginative and sour man whom the Indians found it difficult to tolerate. The British High Commissioner ultimately persuaded the Consortium to get rid of the Brigadier by paying him two years' salary for the unexpired period of his contract. The Brigadier was then given a knighthood in true British style.

We had some trouble with the Russians only on one occasion due to language difficulty. In Bhilai the Russians lost one of the best metallurgical engineers of the Soviet Union, Mr. Krantenko, a tall giant of a Ukrainian who died in an accident in Bhilai in 1956. Late one winter afternoon after a day's hard work Mr. Krantenko along with his schoolboy son set out in a station-wagon to a marsh not far from Bhilai to shoot ducks. He shot quite a few birds with his shot-gun and gathered all the birds except one which fell in the middle of the marsh. Determined to retrieve the bird Mr. Krantenko got into the water, swam to the middle of the marsh and then discovered that the marsh was much deeper than he thought it was and it was full of slippery weeds; the more he struggled the more he got entangled. He was a good swimmer and a strong man but he just could not make himself free from the entanglement. The boy sitting on the bank anxiously watching his father saw him ultimately disappear into the water. The little fellow who knew only a few words of English ran as fast as he could to the nearest village and shouted to an uncomprehending school-teacher and a bunch of villagers: 'Papa in water'. The villagers ran to the spot with the boy and pulled Mr. Krantenko out of the marsh after a great struggle; but by that time this giant of a man was dead. We were all very unhappy about it. All manner of legal formalities had to be gone through. There was an inquest by the local Magistrate who, after examining all the evidence, pronounced the verdict: 'I am satisfied that Mr. Krantenko died in an accident.' This deeply upset the Russian representatives at Bhilai. 'Here is one of the greatest Russian

metallurgical engineers who laid down his life at the altar of India-Russia friendship and this man, a citizen of a friendly country, says, he is satisfied! Is it not inhuman?' they said. We had great difficulty in explaining to our Russian friends that the death of Mr. Krantenko was not a matter of satisfaction for the Indian Magistrate; what he meant was that he was convinced by the evidence that it was death due to accident. But it required a lot of explanation to avoid an international misunderstanding!

The Russian erectors were put through an intensive course of orientation before they left Russia for India. Apart from the rigid discipline of an authoritarian Government under whom they worked they also seemed always to be conscious that the prestige of Soviet Russia was at stake and it was expected of each of them to give his best to the work. Their bosses were determined to implement the project according to a very rigid schedule of work. We were all the time kept on our toes and when our organization at Bhilai failed on occasions to supply the necessary local materials and personnel at the right time the Soviet Ambassador at New Delhi at once took it up directly with Mr. Nehru.

It was on one such occasion that Prime Minister Nehru sent for the Steel Minister, the Chairman of our Corporation and me to face the Russian Ambassador and his cohorts. As we walked into the Prime Minister's Office we found the eminent Soviet Ambassador already sitting there flanked by eight or ten of his top experts. We settled down. The Ambassador took out of his pocket a written memorandum and solemnly read out: 'Your Excellency, I have been instructed by the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to convey to your Excellency their sense of disappointment about the failure of your Excellency's organization to produce at the right time, according to schedules agreed to between our two Governments (whatever the material or personnel was), and I have been instructed by the Government of the U.S.S.R. to convey to your Excellency that unless your Excellency's organization at Bhilai honours these commitments the U.S.S.R. Government will consider itself free from its own commitments to deliver the

goods to your Excellency's Government at the right time.'

Thereupon the Prime Minister of India replied with all his charm that he greatly appreciated the determination of the representatives of the U.S.S.R. Government to complete the erection of the steel plant strictly according to schedule; our objectives were common; but after all his Excellency the Ambassador could not expect the Prime Minister to enter into the details of all that he had said; that was the responsibility of his colleague, the Steel Minister, and the senior officials who were present; and no doubt these things would be put right at a very early date. Thereafter the distinguished Ambassador and his eight or ten experts solemnly trooped out. After they had gone the Prime Minister gave us a real good dressing down. 'I don't want to listen to any excuses. What this man said must be right. This fellow, the Ambassador of a foreign country, would not dare sit in front of me and say these things if his complaint was not well founded. And now for goodness' sake go and do what they want or I will do something to all of you.' So the Minister, the Chairman and I walked out looking rather crest-fallen. Neither the German Ambassador nor the British High Commissioner would dare to go even to the Steel Minister to make a complaint of this sort about Rourkela or Durgapur. Only an Economic Counsellor or a Trade Commissioner would come on rare occasions to tell us hesitatingly that perhaps we might remove some of the difficulties that stood in the way of progress at the plant site.

My principal responsibility was to find and train the human beings who were to take over and operate the gadgets after they were erected by the foreigners. It was a large operation to go through 6,000 odd applications from young graduate engineers to recruit 2,500 of them in addition to 18,000 operatives (lower grade technicians who were not graduates). About 150 experienced steelmen had to be found from the existing steel plants of Tata's and Indian Iron. Every time I went to Tata's steel city, Jamshedpur, Sir Jahangir Ghandy, the Managing Director used to say: 'Well, Sudhir, whom are you taking away this time?' We did not have to take anybody away, because Tata's went out of their way to help us. Without the unstinted

co-operation of Tata's we could never have manned the Government Steel Plants. By friendly arrangement they gave us a hundred experienced steelmen. In addition Tata's trained most of our 18,000 operatives (non-graduate technicians) in their steel works; some were trained in the small steel plant in Mysore as well as large engineering industries in different parts of the country. Even so nearly 1,000 of them had to be sent abroad in addition to the 2,500 raw young graduates in mechanical, electrical, metallurgical and chemical engineering. We had to commandeer the services of the only six engineering colleges in India which taught metallurgy to produce emergency metallurgical graduates for us. We needed a minimum of 600 metallurgical graduates but in India only 200 existed at the time. So by special arrangement with the colleges we sent them graduates in mechanical or chemical engineering and they were put through a sandwich course of one year to become emergency metallurgists.

The solicitude of the Russians in the matter of training these young people was very impressive. They insisted on working out with us a programme of training more than 1,000 of these young men in steel plants in the U.S.S.R. They selected for the training of these Indian engineers the steel plants at Zaporoshe, Zhdanov, Azovstal near the Black Sea in the Ukraine because climatic conditions were favourable for tropical men; the other parts of Russia were too cold in winter. The amount of attention the Russians gave to the work and the living conditions of these young Indians was touching. In fact the Russians offered to train more of our men than we agreed to send them. They were of course not willing to train men for our other two steel plants because they were built by the Germans and the British. The steel industry in Britain has a capacity of about twenty million tons and in West Germany about eighteen million tons as against Russian capacity of sixty-five million tons. The room for training our men was naturally small in Britain and West Germany. They accepted the responsibility of training 350 men in the U.K. and 250 in West Germany. We, therefore, had to look for training facilities for about 1,000 young Indian engineers in the United States

which had an installed capacity for producing 140 million tons of steel per year. But it was not an easy job to secure training facilities for such a large number of raw young men in American Steel Plants. We approached the federation of American steel companies and got a flat 'no' for an answer. Their Chairman, Mr. Benjamin Fairless, visited India in the winter of 1957. The Chairman of our Steel Corporation talked very persuasively to Mr. Fairless under the auspices of the American Ambassador but it was no use. Mr. Fairless explained that the American Steel Industry had an unpleasant experience with foreigners. In Venezuela the Americans had built a steel plant and they accepted 50 young Venezuelans for training in American steel plants. And it was their experience that these young Venezuelans never took their work seriously; they were more interested in playing about with girls; they did not like doing dirty jobs with their own hands; they were a gay crowd; the Americans had enough of these foreigners; they did not want any more raw foreigners to deal with in the American steel mills.

We were in a quandary. We did not know how to tackle Mr. Benjamin Fairless, the great American steel king. So I quietly walked into the Prime Minister's House that evening and asked his secretary if I might see the P.M. By that time I had been reinstated in the Prime Ministerial circles. I had no appointment. But I explained that I had to see the P.M. rather urgently because I had heard that Mr. Fairless was going to see him next morning at 10 and I wanted to tell the P.M. something about it. 'Are you sure you have something really important to tell him?' asked the P.M.'s secretary and reluctantly sent in a little note saying: 'Sudhir Ghosh is here.'

The messenger promptly came back to say that the Prime Minister wanted to see me. As I walked into Mr. Nehru's study he greeted me with the remark: 'Well, Sudhir, what are you doing here at this time of the evening?' So I explained that we were in trouble about the training of 1,000 young engineers in America. Could he possibly say something to Mr. Benjamin Fairless who was coming to see him the next morning? I handed to him a memorandum on the subject of training these 1,000 young engineers and explained how the Ford Foundation

had offered to pay the entire cost of it but the difficulty was how to secure the training facilities. The memorandum was a long one and I did not expect him to read it. I politely offered to explain in a couple of minutes the gist of it. But he started reading it and read the whole thing from one end to the other and said 'Well, what's wrong with it? You say this man Fairless doesn't agree to take these boys? All right, you leave these papers with me.' So I left.

Early next morning the Chairman of our Board, who was a late riser, was rung up while he was fast asleep. He was about to give this early caller a bit of his mind but found to his surprise that it was the Prime Minister himself calling. The Prime Minister said he understood that the Chairman wanted to send 1,000 young men to the United States for training and there was some difficulty about it. This Mr. Fairless was coming to see the P.M. at 10. The Chairman had better come a few minutes earlier. As he arrived at the Prime Minister's office he found Mr. Fairless had already arrived and was waiting in the Private Secretary's room along with the American Ambassador. The Chairman was called in first and he came out within a few minutes. The effect of his going in and coming out was magical on Mr. Fairless. As the steel magnate was called in the first thing he said was: 'Mr. Prime Minister, your Government appears to be anxious about some training facilities for your young steel engineers. I have thought this matter over. We shall be delighted to help your Government in this matter.' The Prime Minister merely nodded his head in approval. He did not have to ask for anything.

The Americans took 200 of our boys in the first instance and after seeing them for the first six months they said they would be glad to have the rest of the 1,000. These young Indian engineers were distributed in groups in Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Cleveland, Chicago. The American steel-makers reported that these men were prepared to do any job however dirty; they never failed to appear at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning if asked to assist in a breakdown job. They did all that they were told to do and asked for more. After this training programme was a year old I went to visit the boys as their 'honorary uncle'



in all the steel centres and spent some time with them and with their American hosts. The managers of the steel plants said that if our future steelmen were young people of this calibre there was no need for us to worry about our steel industry. They offered to employ the whole lot of them in the American steel plants if we were willing to let them stay in the United States for five years. I of course thanked them for their kind offer and explained that I was anxious to get them back as early as possible. The retired Government officials on our Board had all predicted that these young engineers would never dirty their hands in American steel works. Didn't all young Indians prefer white-collar jobs? But these prophets of gloom proved to be out of date.

This programme of training 1,000 steel engineers for India is one of the most successful joint ventures that the Indians and Americans had ever undertaken. But even here it was interesting to see the difference between the Russian approach to India and the approach of the West. It throws a lot of light on the subtlety of Soviet Russia and the lack of it in our American friends, in spite of all their generosity. On my way back from this visit to the U.S. Steel Plants in the autumn of 1958 I spent some time in West Germany and Britain to see how our trainees were getting on before I went to the U.S.S.R. Food was not nearly so plentiful in the U.S.S.R. as it was in the United States. But I was much touched to see how the Russians had gone out of their way to make the young Indians feel at home. A large percentage of the young engineers were South Indian Brahmins who were strict vegetarians. They would not touch even eggs. Food in Russia consisted mainly of bread and meat. There was no shortage of these two items of staple diet, but there was acute shortage of fresh vegetables and fruits. I found that the Soviet authorities had made special arrangements to carry vegetables twice a week by air from another state of the U.S.S.R. to these steel centres to feed the Indian vegetarians. They had employed a special staff in the hostels where the Indians were staying to ensure that these boys were properly fed.

More important than anything else was the nature of the

training that the Indian trainees were given. These young men had very good academic qualifications, but they had never seen the inside of a steel plant. No training was better for them than the doing of an actual job. Their stay abroad was for a brief period of nine to twelve months. Each one of them was already assigned by us to a particular job in a particular department, in operation or maintenance, which he was expected to do on return home. He would be effectively trained if he did that particular job with his own hands for nine to twelve months instead of watching somebody else doing it.

The Russians did exactly that. The Indian trainees were as good as employees of the Soviet steel works although they were not to get a salary. Their fellow-workers were instructed to help these foreigners to get accustomed to their jobs and to treat them as co-workers. This worked very well and the men trained in the Russian steel plants clearly had more effective training.

There was only one matter about which we had some misgiving in our minds when we sent such a large number of young men to a Communist country. Were they not going to indoctrinate these impressionable young men while on training in Soviet Russia? We found that they made no effort directly or indirectly to indoctrinate them. They never encouraged the boys to go to any meeting or discussion or seminar which had anything to do with the Communist Party. They merely showered kindness on the Indians in abundance. And this worked much better to convert them into friends of the U.S.S.R. than any propaganda however subtle could have done.

Our American friends on the other hand got much less kudos for their generosity to the young Indians than they deserved. The Ford Foundation spent a generous amount of money on the training of these steel engineers. But it was not possible to treat these young Indians as temporary employees of the American Steel Plants. The Steel-workers Union would not permit such temporary employment of foreigners. There was much difficulty in giving them actual jobs. The training in the works was mostly in the shape of observation of operation. But some *de facto* arrangements were possible in many cases with employees of the works. They liked these Indian boys and often

a fellow steel-worker would say 'Now, come on fellow, you take over and I relax for a while.' Through such unofficial friendly arrangements the trainees learnt a lot. But they did not have as much to do as they did in the Russian steel plants.

In addition to these difficulties we discovered that our American friends had their own special notions about the training of steel engineers. In each steel centre where the Indian trainees were sent they made elaborate arrangements for the young Indians to attend special courses of lectures in the local universities. They were asked to attend lectures on American literature, American history and American way of life and a whole lot of other things which were innocuous enough but had nothing to do with the training of steel engineers. The theory was that these young men would in due course rise to managerial positions and such men should receive a broad-based training and not merely restricted technical training inside a steel works. This was all very nice but these men had been sent abroad for training only for nine to twelve months; in that short period they had to learn as much as possible about steel making and there was hardly any time to bother about history, literature and culture. We were interested only in practical training. We had quite a debate on the wastefulness of it all. But our American friends insisted on having it their own way. The Chairman of our Board shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Let them have it their own way. You do not look a gift horse in the mouth.'

The Communists who normally indulge in indoctrination and propaganda got the kudos of being disinterested friends who were concerned only with the job of turning the young Indian engineers into steel makers. The Americans with whom we had no ideological conflict successfully created the impression that they were doing a bit of American propaganda. The training inside the steel works cost no money because the steel companies did not charge any training fee. A large amount of American money had, however, to be paid to the universities for the lectures on literature and culture.

The British and German hosts of the Indian engineers did a competent job of training them. They were not interested in

organizing lectures for these young men on German or British literature or culture. But they had the same difficulty in treating them as temporary employees. The Unions would not permit it. In spite of the best of intentions the training did not amount to an on-the-job training. But British and German workers were just as friendly as the Americans and by friendly arrangement it was often possible for the Indian trainees to do actual jobs. In a Communist country there is no union problem. Whatever decisions the bosses take are carried out.

But apart from giving effective training to more than a thousand engineers and technicians in Soviet steel works the Russians scored over the British and the Germans in another matter. Towards the end of the three years of erection of plant and machinery at Bhilai, the top operation man of the Soviet team, G. F. Michelivich, came to me with a list of about 350 experienced men selected carefully from many different Russian steel works who had long experience of all the different operation and maintenance jobs. And these were men not merely at the level of departmental superintendents or assistant superintendents but also foremen, assistant foremen and First Hands and Second Hands. At all levels they wanted experienced Russian operational staff to stand beside their Indian counterparts in all the key jobs to ensure that the Bhilai Steel Plant got off to a good start. Our Financial Adviser said he did not see any reason why we should employ as many as 350 foreigners in addition to our own full-scale organization for operation of the plant. It was going to cost us five million rupees (over a million dollars) and the Financial Adviser considered it wasteful expenditure. The Russians were adamant. They took the position that it was not just a question of the good name of the Indian Government; the prestige of the Soviet Government was at stake, they could not afford to let anything go wrong with the operation of the Bhilai Steel Plant. They insisted on our accepting these 350 experienced Russian steel makers for a limited period; as soon as the Indian counterpart of a Russian felt confident that he could do without the Russian he would be sent back to Russia. But the representatives of the Soviet Government were just not prepared to take any risk.

Their argument also made perfectly good business sense. They pointed out that if the steel works did not get off to a good start and if we had two or three years teething trouble as we had in the German Plant at Rourkela then two years' production loss would be equal to the cost of a whole new steel plant. Compared to such loss the cost of employing the foreigners, five million rupees, was nothing. After a good deal of tussle between the Russians and our Financial Adviser, I made a compromise. Michalevich and I went through the list and reduced the size of it from 350 to 285 men. We should be more than grateful to the Soviet Government for these 285 Russian operational staff. Their presence in the Bhilai Steel works in the initial stages of its operation was the clue to the success of the Bhilai Steel Plant. It took the German Plant in Rourkela seven to eight years to reach its normal rated capacity. The Durgapur steel plant reached normal output in two to three years which was not at all bad. But the Russian plant reached normal output within one year and nothing went wrong with it from the very first day.

But it was not easy for our British or German or American friends to give us 500 or so experienced steel makers from steel plants in their countries. In their kind of society a man is free to go or not to go to India. And why should he take up a temporary job in India? He may be willing to do it if he is given a much larger salary than he gets in his own country. Even if he was given more money why should he go to a tropical climate which his wife did not like? And what about his children's education? And why should he take the risk of finding, on his return that somebody else was promoted to take his place and he himself had lost his chance of being promoted to a higher position? Only retired men or men about to retire were interested to come to India for short-term appointments. The younger men who were willing to come to India were usually the second-rate and the third-rate ones.

It is not that our American, British or German friends were unwilling to help us. Their difficulty was genuine. But there was one place where they disappointed us. Our men trained abroad naturally returned to the plant site ahead of the time

when the erection of the different units was completed. As they returned in batches we wanted these bright young men to be associated with the erection of the machinery and equipment that they were going to take over on completion; if each man knew all that went into the particular gadget he was going to operate it would obviously be a help to him. Such knowledge would particularly help the maintenance men. But the erectors, who were in a hurry to complete their job according to their contracts, found these hundreds of enthusiastic youngsters strewn all over the plant site a great nuisance; they got in the way of their work; their presence interfered with progress, they said. In Rourkela and Durgapur the erectors of the plants did not show as much interest as they could have done in the young Indians who were eager to learn as much as possible from the foreign erectors about the plant, machinery and equipment they were going to inherit.

Here the Russians showed exemplary patience with our young novices. It can honestly be said that whatever may be the politics of Communism, in this matter of building the Bhilai Steel Plant the Russians made available to the Indians their entire technical know-how without any reservation. For the Germans and the Britons it was a business proposition, a contract. (For the British Consortium that built the Durgapur Steel Plant it was the biggest single contract [over £110 million] ever placed with British industry.) They took immense pride in the achievements of German or British industry. They made a good job of it. They were also interested in the good name of their countries. But their main incentive obviously was profit-making, which was perfectly legitimate. For the Russians it was a no-profit-no-loss job. Their main objective was to make an impact on the mind of India. From that point of view they did magnificently.

The Russian approach to an underdeveloped country like India, so touchy about its sense of self-respect, is like this: 'We know you Indians do not understand our Communism. Nor do we understand what you call democracy. But we are friends. Let us not waste time quarrelling about the comparative merits of democracy and communism. Let us get on with the

job. An underdeveloped country will never become truly independent until it builds up its basic industries. Without steel there can be no real development of the Indian economy. So we bring into India plant, machinery and equipment for a million-ton steel plant. We write in our books that you owe us so many million roubles. You do not pay anything back in the first five years of the operation of the plant. We make the rate of interest only 2 per cent which is only a service charge. We make no money out of you. Within six or seven years you find that you can repay your debt out of the earnings of the steel plant itself. Nothing is given or taken as charity.'

Compare this approach with the American approach to the same Indians. I took a hand in getting the Americans interested in building the fourth steel plant in India, at Bokaro in the Bihar coalfields. The American Ambassador in India, Professor Kenneth Galbraith, a devoted friend of India, was excited about the project. The President of the United States, Mr. Kennedy, than whom India never had a greater friend, took a very great deal of personal interest in the project. The President went out of his way to make a public statement that he did not see any reason why American money could not be given to India to build a state-owned steel plant, if the Indian Government wanted it to be state-owned. If the American Government could lend a huge sum of money to Canada to build a state-owned power industry why not American money to India for a state-owned steel industry? For over a year the American Ambassador proclaimed in numerous press conferences how this was going to be a four-million-ton steel plant, the biggest in Asia, a show piece, a real demonstration of America's industrial might.

The first thing that happened was a hitch. The Americans claimed that it was for them to decide whether the Bokaro Steel Plant was 'feasible'. The Russians never claimed to decide whether the Bhilai Steel Plant was feasible or not. The Indians possess enough technical know-how to know all about their raw materials, water, power and other resources; they have so far built up only six-million-ton steel capacity which is in the process of being expanded to nine million tons and the

Indian plan was to raise the country's steel capacity to nineteen million by 1970, which was not too large for a country of 470 million people. In these circumstances if the Indians had decided that a steel plant of a million ton capacity was feasible at Bokaro was it any part of the business of the Americans to sit in judgement over the Indians who had already taken a decision to build a steel plant at Bokaro? The Americans were entirely within their rights to decide on what terms they were prepared to participate in the venture and they had a right to insist that, from the writing of the project report to the commissioning of the plant, they should do the job in their own way as the Russians did. But a great big team of thirty to forty American steel experts was sent out to India to produce a 'feasibility report'. After months of labour they produced a monumental report in which it was claimed that nothing less than a four-million-ton steel plant (costing 1,000 million dollars in foreign exchange alone) was an economic proposition. In the face of clear demonstration that a million-ton steel plant could be highly profitable, as in the case of Tata's or Indian Iron this was a pompous claim. Gratuitous recommendations were made about giving a management contract to a private enterprise.

All this was going on while the money was not even in sight. On the strength of the advice of such experts the U.S. Administration went to the Congress with a request for 1,000 million dollars for the building of an American steel plant in India. Advice was given to them by Indian friends that they should ask for only 200 million dollars for a million-ton steel plant, which would take them three years to build; thereafter they could ask for a further 200 million dollars and so on for successive stages of expansion. But this was not heeded. The Senators and Congressmen who examined the Foreign Aid Bill in the summer of 1963 in their Committees found it atrocious to provide 1,000 million dollars for one single item of assistance to a country. This was something new in the history of American foreign aid. One of the politicians introduced a rider into the Bill stating, without mentioning India, that the United States should not invest more than 100 million dollars on any single



item of development in any underdeveloped country. And that was the end of the American steel plant at Bokaro. The Russians stepped in at the right psychological moment and said that if the Americans were not going to build the Bokaro Steel Plant they would be glad to do it for India. They are going to do it. And they are sure to make a bigger impact by doing it than they did by building the Bhilai Steel Plant.

The Russians not only made a powerful impact on Indian public opinion by the subtlety of their approach to the question of industrialization of an underdeveloped country but made quite an impression even on a person like me who had no love for communism, by their intelligent understanding of what was the nature of India's basic trouble. They put it very pointedly to me in the course of a memorable discussion I had in Moscow in the autumn of 1958, when I had gone to the U.S.S.R. officially on behalf of our steel corporation to inspect the arrangements for the training of Indian engineers and to study the managerial set-up and the special technical achievements of the Russian steel industry.

On my arrival in Moscow, Mr. Shermetiev, Chairman of the State Council on Economic Relations with Foreign Countries, together with fifteen top men of the Soviet steel industry met me for a three-hour discussion on steel-making in Soviet Russia. They sent me along with a Soviet officer to a selected number of steel plants in the Ukraine and also to one of their ore mines in Krivoi Rog and a coalmine in the Stalino area. On my return to Moscow I met a group of veteran American steelmen who were on a trip to the U.S.S.R. and had just made a study of the Soviet steel industry; they were surprised to find that the yield of Russian blast furnaces as well as open hearth furnaces was something like 25 per cent to 30 per cent higher in the U.S.S.R. than in the U.S.A. Apart from such technical achievements I was intrigued to find that the atmosphere in the Russian steel plants was basically different from what you feel in a European or American Steel Plant; an abundance of enthusiasm had been worked up at all levels from the plant director to the ordinary worker. The enthusiasm was the key to the whole thing and it could not be

explained away by saying that force was the only thing that drove them. The basic pay and the system of incentives was very much the same as in a capitalist economy. They were not by any means a classless society but the number of classes was small. But there was something extra somewhere which it would be superficial to explain merely by saying that they were in a society in which men were ordered about. Men were of course not free to say what they liked or to strike or bargain with the bosses, but there was something more in it all than the compulsion of force.

On my return to Moscow after the tour of the steel-coal region the Russian steel bosses gave me a lunch at a fashionable restaurant called 'Praha'. They never invited their guests to their homes. It seemed normal in Moscow to start lunch at 3 in the afternoon and to go on till 6 p.m. and there seemed to be innumerable courses of food, interrupted by the drinking of numerous toasts of eternal friendship between India and Soviet Russia. Towards the end of the discussion the senior-most Soviet steel boss asked the interpreter, a Major Vinogradov, to tell me that he had an important question to ask me but if the question embarrassed me there was no need for me to answer it. I cheerfully said that I would certainly answer the question without hesitation if I knew the answer.

The question was certainly an awkward one. They got regular reports, they said, from Bhilai where 1,100 of their best men were working with their Indian colleagues and they also got regular reports from Russians doing an exactly similar steel job in China. The reports from Bhilai said that the Russians were impressed with the eagerness and high level of intelligence of the young Indian engineers and workmen. There was not even a shortage of qualified engineers in India because the country had not been able to make adequate use even of those already qualified. In their judgement young Indian engineers training in Soviet steel plants were men of higher calibre than their Chinese counterparts receiving similar training in the U.S.S.R. And yet the Russians in India were in the embarrassing position of having to hustle the Indian steel bosses all along the line, whereas in China it was the Chinese bosses

who hustled the Russian technicians all the time in order to get the maximum from them. To the Russians it was puzzling. How was a country like India, so rich in human talent, so fortunate in raw materials, fumbling so badly? 'And please, Mr. Ghosh,' he added ruefully, 'do not tell us that the difference between the Indian situation and the Chinese is that you are believers in democracy and the Chinese are communists; it has nothing to do with communism or democracy.'

The Russians hit the nail right on the head when they pointed out, in their own way, that India's crucial problem was not shortage of resources, human or financial or technical, but the dead wood at the top, at the sources of power. China vibrates; India crawls along. Democracy is an excuse for lack of leadership and a sense of direction.

In an underdeveloped country it is perfectly sound policy that basic industries, such as steel, should be owned by the State as far as possible. In the United States, which has an installed steel capacity of 140 million tons per year, it is clearly not necessary for the Government to engage in steel-making because if it is left to private enterprise the American community will get the steel it requires and at the price it can afford. In India if we wish to develop 19 million tons of steel-capacity by 1970 (which is planned but not likely) the job just will not be done if it is left only to private enterprise. Government initiative is necessary in order to gather together from other areas of the world the necessary capital that has to be invested. But all the battle in India is over ownership. Our politicians in India have yet to realize that the crux of the so-called socialist society is a problem of management and direction, not of mere ownership.

Our 2,500 young steel engineers trained in Russia, the United States, Britain and West Germany blossomed out like flowers. They are today the mainstay of the Government steel complex and its future expansion at Bokaro and elsewhere. But it was depressing to see how these flowers were being smothered by the dead weight of imbecility at the top. A committee consisting of the Chief Russian steel man at Bhilai, the Chief German steel man at Rourkela, and the Chief British steel

man at Durgapur, together with the Chief Engineer of Indian Iron and the General Superintendent of Tata's, laboriously interviewed and assessed every single engineer of the Government steel plants (young engineers as well as 150 experienced people recruited from the existing steel plants) and showed the directors what degree of responsibility could be given to each and how many non-Indians were necessary to fill in the gaps and for what period. But the recommendations of this expert committee (these men were steel experts of the highest standing, judged by any standard anywhere in the world) were scrapped by a committee of three directors of Hindustan Steel consisting of a retired civil engineer from the railways, a retired buildings and roads engineer from a State, and a retired finance officer from the Ministry of Finance. They were afraid to trust young men with responsibility.

None of these men knew anything about steel making but they were in power. Such dead wood in power is typical of the socialist society which we are building in India. The Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was made the first General Manager of the Rourkela Steel Works; a Secretary to the Government of West Bengal in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Forests, was made the first General Manager of the Durgapur Steel Plant and the present General Manager of the Bhilai Steel Plant is a Member of the Indian Audit & Accounts Service who normally should be an Accountant-general in a State.

We inherited our philosophy of a civil service from our British predecessors. You can recruit a young man with a good degree in Oxford or Cambridge or some other University in Economics, or Natural Sciences or Anthropology—it does not matter which—and train him to do a variety of jobs, maybe in the Treasury or the Board of Trade or the Home Office or the Ministry of Pensions. And it is impressive to see how many different jobs a good civil servant can do. But when the British Government nationalized the steel industry some years ago they did not commit the folly of sending a civil servant from Whitehall to the Steel Company of Wales or any other Steel

Works as General Manager. But we in India have improved upon the British. According to the Indian philosophy of a civil service a man may be a Magistrate for one year, a Judge the next year, a Registrar of Co-operative Societies the third year, a Conservator of Forests the fourth year; but our politicians have yet to realize that the same man cannot be the General Manager of a Steel Plant in the fifth year. We are today paying the price of this kind of folly; the cost of production of Indian steel is higher than that of Australian steel; our concentrated public investment on steel makes losses instead of profit; our public enterprises as a whole yield a return of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent and we cheerfully imagine that we can build a socialist society at that rate!

But the root of the trouble is in the politicians at the sources of power and not the civil servants. The civil servants are trained men and on the whole a disciplined crowd. When India became independent in 1947 the British members of the Indian Civil Service resigned and we were left with less than 400 Indians of the old Indian Civil Service trained by our British predecessors. These men proved to be our saviours. If we had not had this handful of trained civil servants we could not have survived the shock of dividing one country into two independent sovereign states. But human nature and love of power being what they are, these saviours of ours also proved to be a problem. This group of less than 400 trained men occupied all the power points in the Central Government as well as the State Governments. There were so few of them that each man got much more than double or treble promotion. But that was not enough. Wherever a new power point was created, such as the general-managership of a large steel complex, this trade union of bureaucrats (the most coherent trade union in the world) insisted on one of their 'boys' occupying the new power point. If a man adequate for the job is found from a private enterprise and employed by Government he is, of course, a 'rank outsider'.

And yet the solution of these problems is not very far to seek. The problem of the Government's steel industry, for example, can be solved in no time. If the maturer men among the young

engineers are given the maximum responsibility; if General Managers are recruited from among men with something like twenty years managerial experience in private enterprise (steel works or other large scale engineering works) and not from the Government civil services; if authority is decentralized to the greatest possible extent to Boards of Directors consisting of men with industrial experience and background (and not retired or semi-retired government officials); then the managerial problem can be solved without importing managers from abroad. It is not the absence of Indian talent but excessively centralized bureaucratic control and lack of courage in political men that stand in our way. Political men in power are supposed to lead. But in actual fact they follow.

Members of Parliament imagine that parliamentary responsibility includes interference with the day-to-day management of public enterprises; they have yet to realize that their real interest is in matters of policy and in results; not in individual failures. A Minister can be the father-protector of the autonomy of an autonomous authority and also satisfy Parliament with the yield from a public investment at the end of the year; or he can use Parliament as an excuse for destroying the autonomy of an autonomous authority and use the autonomy of that authority for denying Parliament what is its due.

I have tried to throw some light on India's basic problem of organization by talking in terms of the steel industry because one can talk with authority about those things which one has grappled with at first hand. But the nature of the problem is the same in agricultural production or population control or in other crucial issues of today. It is a problem of organization, not of resources.

To handle the problem of production and distribution of food we need: (i) a Seeds Corporation, (ii) a Fertilizer Corporation, (iii) a Minor Irrigation Corporation, and (iv) a Food Trading Corporation. In controlling food prices police power which we are using today is absolutely useless. Exhortation by politicians is more useless. The only power that is effective is the power to buy and the power to sell. In the United States the job of the Central Commodity Corporation is to take care

of a huge surplus; in India by price support we have to raise agricultural output. In our situation a Food Trading Corporation can secure for the agriculturist the cost of irrigation water, fertilizers, pesticides, better cattle and equipment through a guaranteed floor price. If the Food Corporation buys up 20 per cent of the annual output of the country in addition to all the foodgrains imported from the United States and elsewhere it can effectively use its power to sell wherever there is a shortage and thus control prices and also give a boost to production.

For a real breakthrough on seeds, fertilizers and irrigation water these Corporations must be genuinely autonomous, commercial and dynamic bodies. They should be entrusted to young people trained in management and subjected to a few policy directives but not the ramshackle of bureaucratic rules. But who is going to allow such Corporations to function as honestly autonomous bodies? Whenever a Corporation or a Company has been created for a public undertaking in India it has invariably been reduced to another bureaucratic Government Department playing with red-tape.

India's population is about to reach the 500 million mark. Unless the rate of growth is drastically reduced in the next five to ten years the problem of population will be beyond control and it will destroy all other effort for development, agricultural or industrial. The 320 districts of India are divided into 5,400 development blocks; if we add the urban areas we have to deal with roughly 6,000 units. If we can organize only 100 insertions of the I.U.C.D. (Intra-uterine Contraceptive Device) loops per month per unit (to which there is no significant mental resistance in our rural as well as urban population) then we can do 1,200 per year per unit or 6,000 per unit in five years, i.e. a total of 36 million, which is about 40 per cent of our adult female population of child-bearing age. It has been calculated by the U.N. team of experts who recently visited India that if we can accomplish this in five years we can reduce the rate of growth of population by eight and a half million per year, from fifteen million to six and a half million; then only will the problem of food production assume manageable proportions.

To do this we need 6,000 mobile motor vans fitted both as ordinary dispensaries and also for the I.U.C.D. work and the service should be taken unobtrusively to the doors of our women from village to village and should be made free from all fuss and bother and cost them not a penny. With each vehicle we need a team consisting of two graduate doctors (one man and one women) two trained nurses and four women social workers. We have in India 80,000 medical graduates already and we produce every year 2,000 women graduates and 4,000 men graduates; we require only two years' crop. It is not an insuperable problem to gather together these teams if we are prepared to pay reasonable salaries and to provide reasonable amenities of living for them in the rural areas of India. This is not a problem of resources. We have more money for population control than we can use. All advanced countries of the world are only too willing to help India to deal with this frightening problem. The solution offered by the U.N. team may not be mathematically precise. But it does show that the solution of the problem would be within our reach if we had the organization. But where is the organization that can reduce the rate of India's population growth from fifteen million a year to six and a half million a year in five years time?

In my five years in the Government Steel Corporation I did a lot of hard work but I could not make a dent on the minds of political men in power in this matter of finding an answer to the problem of organization. So in 1960 I gave up my attractive job and an attractive salary and joined Parliament in the hope that perhaps from that base of operation one could make an impact on the minds of politicians in power and on India's basic problem of organization.

India today is very close to a major economic disaster. The country can be saved from this disaster only by bringing talent into Parliament and into the Government. The country is astonishingly rich in human talent. It is no problem for men in power to bring into our Parliament of 550, in the General Election of February 1967, something like 200 to 300 really talented men and into the Government about a dozen really outstanding Indians from the Universities, from the legal and



other professions, from amongst industrial executives and from the Armed Services. Nobody in the country believes, however, that those who are in power have the remotest intention of doing such a thing. They seem to imagine that they can save this great country by nationalizing a few banks and by indulging in a few shibboleths about socialism without comprehending the problem of organization. India's problem today is not money, Indian or foreign. What is frightening about India today is the determination of well-entrenched mediocrity to prevent talent from coming anywhere near the sources of power. While the imbecility of politicians is steadily creating conditions of disintegration in the country the silver lining in the clouds is that the professionalized Armed Forces, fortunately free from political ambitions, will not allow the country to disintegrate.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *I Continue as a Gandhian Emissary*

I OFTEN think that for one thing I should always be grateful to the Chinese Communists; they put right my relationship with Mr. Nehru, which Gandhiji had failed to do. After pursuing, during fifteen years of his Prime Ministership, the policy of what he called democratic socialism internally and the policy of non-alignment externally, Mr. Nehru had a rude shock when the Chinese Communists dangerously invaded India in October–November 1962. He realized that he had no real answer to the problem posed by the phenomenon of Chinese military power. He was chastened by the climacteric experience of Chinese invasion. I tried to help him to find an answer to this grave problem of Chinese pressure which threatened to destroy all our plans for economic and social development and our efforts to build a new life for our people. I noted that he did not spurn my offer of help. For the first time he trusted me with his confidence.

After the Chinese decided—quite unexpectedly—to withdraw from the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, I worried Mr. Nehru a number of times with my nagging fear that if and when the Chinese decided to repeat their performance he was really not in a position to deal effectively with that situation. When he found that I was insistent he told me one day to write a memorandum stating precisely what I wanted him to do and my argument for it. He promised to give me his comments in writing.

The substance of the whole memorandum, dated 2nd January 1963, was in the first paragraph, in which I said:

‘This is a proposal for a diplomatic arrangement between India on the one hand and a group of parliamentary democracies on the

other, the U.S.A., Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, that these countries agree to supply the military equipment necessary for enlarging the Indian Army and Air Force and that if at any time, during an interim period of ten years, Communist China threatens to violate the territorial integrity of India and to destroy the freedom and democracy of India this group of countries will come to the defence of India. The proposed diplomatic arrangement is to be directed only against China and not against any other Communist country of the world. It is an integral part of this proposal that the U.S.S.R. be invited to participate in this guarantee of India's territorial integrity against Chinese aggression. Even if the U.S.S.R. does not feel able actually to participate in this guarantee she will, very probably, not take exception to it; something like a reversal of alliances is taking place within the Communist Camp just now. After President Tito's recent visit to Moscow and his endorsement of Mr. Khrushchev's foreign policy and in particular the Cuban affair and the way Mr. Khrushchev ridiculed those who were talking about the "paper tiger of American imperialism" and were forgetting that the tiger had "nuclear teeth", it seems that Mr. Khrushchev is trying to free himself from the pressure of Chinese dogmatism and may not object to an arrangement that will help the process of isolating China. And in the present circumstances the U.S.A. is likely to participate in such an arrangement only if she is confident that such an arrangement will not upset the U.S.S.R. and cause a world war.'

In this memorandum I argued with Mr. Nehru that the military might of China was built up with Russian assistance; the fighting aircraft of the Chinese Air Force had been supplied by Russia; Russia had deep military commitments to China (in spite of grave differences) under the provisions of the Sino-Soviet Military Alliance; if in spite of these commitments, legal and moral, Soviet Russia can be a friend of India (and she is a genuine friend), it should be equally possible for India to continue to be a warm friend of Russia even after India made the kind of arrangement with the Anglo-Americans which I suggested.

I pointed out further that I was not asking Mr. Nehru to accept the kind of military involvement that existed between, say, Pakistan and the U.S.A., with American military installations located in Pakistan territory, nor did I expect him to

enter into military pacts like S.E.A.T.O. or C.E.N.T.O., etc. What I suggested was an exchange of simple letters between the Prime Minister of India and the Prime Ministers of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and also between the Prime Minister of India and the President of the U.S.A., to the effect that India requested and these countries agreed that if, at any time during the next ten years, China threatened to violate the territorial integrity and the independence of India, these countries would automatically come to the defence of India. There would probably be no occasion to call upon these countries to come to the defence of India; because the very existence of such an arrangement would act as a deterrent,

Here is Mr. Nehru's reply, dated 5th January 1963:

*State Guest House  
Lucknow*

*5th January, 1963*

My dear Sudhir,

I have your letter of the 2nd January with the note attached. I do not think that the proposal you have made in the note is a feasible one or is one which we should pursue in existing circumstances. China is undoubtedly much stronger, both in military power and in air power, than India. But Chinese strength has to be related to the actual possibilities on the Indian frontier. They can only use such land forces there as can be supplied from China and the logistic problem is formidable. As for the Air Force, they certainly have a much larger air force but there are also certain limitations. Most of the aircraft is not modern and anyway they have to keep most of it on the eastern coast of China.

I am pretty confident that, with some improvements and additions to our Army and Air Force, we can hold them on our frontiers. Even at present I do not think they can come down to our plains in Assam and elsewhere. After some little time this will become even more difficult. On the whole we should be able to hold them after some little time provided we are helped to build up our air force meanwhile. I have no particular fear of the Chinese overwhelming us either on the land or in the

air. If unfortunately the likely contingency of their attacking us with great force arises and air power is used, an entirely new situation will arise not only in India but in the whole world.

The proposal you have made is almost tantamount to a military alliance. I think that will be bad for India as well as from the point of view of world peace. Fortunately, America and England specially and to some extent some other countries are helping us considerably in refashioning our army and adding to our air force. If we go further into this, it will not mean very much in regard to improvements in our defence forces. It may mean some kind of guarantee for the future. That guarantee will be purchased at the expense of giving up our basic policy of non-alignment. That is not merely some kind of a moral issue but something which makes our people feel that they have to be self-reliant and it also helps greatly in the balance of the world and our search for peace. It will be most unfortunate if we do anything that affects this policy and makes us give up our policy of non-alignment.

There are many other aspects of this which I am not going into now. But I feel quite sure that we should not pursue the line of thought you have indicated in your letter. Meanwhile, we have to strengthen our defence forces to the best of our ability with the help that I hope will come to us from other countries.

Yours sincerely,

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

After I received this letter I had a full discussion with Mr. Nehru on what he said in the letter and the 'other aspects' that he did not go into in writing, and I told him that I was very unhappy because I felt that his reply to the situation created by the phenomenon of Chinese military power was very inadequate; I pointed out that both the Americans and the Russians were saying to us, for two very different sets of reasons, that the Chinese could invade India but were not going to do so; but it was necessary for a sovereign country to make sure that it was in a position to deal with that eventuality if it happened and when it happened.

Mr. Nehru did not permit me to work for the kind of understanding with the Anglo-Americans which I had suggested but, short of any such direct involvement in them, if there was anything else I could do to help in the India-China situation he allowed me to work for it. I told him that we were all his men and we could function only within the limitations of what was there in his mind. Thus I paid three visits to Moscow and Washington in 1963-4 and after long debates with a large number of leading men I raised with the late President Kennedy, on 28th March 1963, a suggestion that the U.S. President and the Soviet Premier might like to make a joint declaration, indicating their deep anxiety over the India-China conflict and their willingness to take a hand in it by offering to associate themselves with and jointly to guarantee any peaceful settlement that might be arrived at between the Governments of India and China directly or through any other means acceptable to them both. I ventured to make this suggestion to the President when the partial test ban treaty was not in sight. The President took the suggestion seriously and Mr. Nehru reacted warmly to it.

I found my explorations, on the subject of the India-China conflict in New Delhi, Moscow and Washington fascinating. There was not much point in talking about these things in London in 1963 because London at that time had become what Mr. George Brown called 'a place where international politicians changed planes'. In January 1963, a few weeks after the Chinese invasion of October-November 1962, two eminent Eastern European Communist leaders, Mr. Kardelj, the Yugoslav Vice-President, and Mr. Rapacki, the Polish Foreign Minister, visited Mr. Nehru in New Delhi. The thesis that these two eminent men put forward to Mr. Nehru was an intriguing one. According to their assessment the purpose of the Chinese invasion of India was to discredit the two basic concepts in international politics, non-alignment and co-existence. According to these distinguished leaders of non-Chinese Communists, what was invaded was non-alignment, and not India. What they appeared to mean was that the Chinese wanted to convince Mr. Khrushchev, and other Communist leaders about the

hollowness and invalidity of the concept of non-alignment of which Prime Minister Nehru was the great architect. As if the Chinese Communists were saying through this action to the other Communists, 'Here we Chinese give the Indians a push and what happens?—the Indians immediately throw themselves into the arms of these imperialist Americans and there goes your non-alignment, and that is all there is to it.'

So, according to these Communist friends of India, the invasion of India was a part of the great debate between the Chinese communists and the other communists, because the Chinese did not share with the others their faith in non-alignment of unaligned countries and co-existence between the Communists and non-Communists in this world. In the circumstances they, i.e. the leaders of the non-Chinese Communist countries, wanted India not to be too excited or emotional about the India-China situation.

In February 1963 I paid a brief visit to Moscow on my way to the United States and had a chance to check on some of these thoughts. It was interesting for me to find that the diplomatic representatives of the Western powers stationed in Moscow and watching from their outposts the India-China conflict were in complete agreement with the view that Mr. Khrushchev and other leaders of the non-Chinese Communist countries were genuinely anxious to prevent another invasion of India by the Chinese. They were completely convinced that Mr. Khrushchev wanted to prevent the Chinese from invading India again. But the question was 'Can he?' And the answer was 'No'! The leverage which Mr. Khrushchev used to have with the Chinese and by using which he could influence thinking in Peking had, by February 1963, become non-existent.

From Moscow I proceeded to the United States. In Washington I talked individually with more than forty of the key men in the U.S. Senate, the House of Representatives and the American Administration over the whole month of March 1963, and rounded it off with a talk with President Kennedy himself. This month-long debate with American politicians was quite an experience. Members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee had a joint discussion with me on this

whole situation at a luncheon on 4th March (see Plate 6). After the lunch I was given a seat on the Senate floor to sit with the Senators to watch the proceedings. To my pleasant surprise I found the whole House officially welcoming me into their midst. There was no lack of feeling for India and they were eager to hear all that I had to say as Mr. Nehru's unofficial emissary, as the following remarks, printed in the Congressional Record, of the welcoming Senators indicated:

VISIT TO THE SENATE BY MR. SUDHIR GHOSH  
MEMBER OF INDIAN PARLIAMENT

*Mr. Humphrey:* 'Mr. President at this time I desire to call to the attention of the Senate the fact that we are privileged this afternoon to have as a distinguished visitor, a fellow parliamentarian from the great nation of India. I call the attention of the Senate to the presence in this Chamber of Mr. Sudhir Ghosh, one of the distinguished and able parliamentary leaders of the Parliament of India, a true friend of democracy and freedom, and a gentleman who enjoys the friendship of many Americans and many Members of this body. Mr. Ghosh is a recognized leader in his country; a disciple of the late Mahatma Gandhi; a friend and adviser to Prime Minister Nehru. I wish to welcome him to the Senate.'

(Applause, Senators rising)

*Mr. Sparkman:* 'Mr. President I should like to say I have had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ghosh ever since 1952 when I first met him on a trip to India. I have had occasion to be with him on many occasions since then. I have found him to be an active, alert, devoted, patriotic Indian, and a very fine and dear friend of the West. He possesses much native ability. He was closely associated with the late Mahatma Gandhi, and was a student, or at least a disciple, of his. I think he still exhibits a great deal of the qualities which characterized Mr. Gandhi.'

'Several of us have just had the privilege of lunching together in the Foreign Relations Committee room, and we went over a good many of the questions which are of mutual concern and interest to both countries. I am delighted Mr. Ghosh is able to be here, and would welcome him every time he came.'

*Mr. Cooper:* 'Mr. President I am glad to join other Senators in welcoming a member of the Indian Parliament. I had the great honour and pleasure of knowing Mr. Ghosh in India. He is highly



respected there. He is one of the leaders in the Congress Party and also in the Parliament. He has been here on several occasions. He has many friends among Members of this body and the other body of the Congress. I concur in the statement that he is a great believer in and advocate of democratic institutions.'

The forty or so leading men with whom I discussed the India-China situation included most of the leading members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and their counterparts in the House as well as leading men in the Administration like Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and Mr. Harriman. Some of my friends amongst the Senators suggested that I must see the President before I returned to India. I had met Mr. Kennedy when he was a Senator and after he became President I had seen him in August 1961. My impression was that he liked me. My friend, Senator John Sherman Cooper, with whom I discussed this matter offered to write to the President. Senator Cooper who was personally held in high regard by President Kennedy wrote to the President and urged him to see me before I returned to New Delhi to report to Mr. Nehru. Mr. Kenneth O'Donnel, the President's Appointments Secretary replied to say that the President would have liked very much to see Mr. Ghosh but this matter was referred to the State Department and they had advised against it. So I gave up the idea of seeing the President and went to see Mr. McGeorge Bundy at the White House on the 27th March 1963.

Mutual friends had warned me that Mr. Bundy was somewhat of a frosty intellectual, but that was only the outer crust; if I successfully broke through the crust I would find him a warm person. So I was determined not to be put off by any coldness. I thought he would get rid of me in fifteen or twenty minutes. But to my pleased surprise I was able to break through the outer crust in the first few minutes and had a real exchange on the India-China situation in a long talk. He was eager to hear my account of all that Mr. Kardelj and Mr. Rapacki had been saying in New Delhi and all I had heard in Moscow from Russians as well as Western diplomats. I expressed my hope that Mr. Bundy would convey to the President all I had to say.

Next morning, 28th March, I gathered that Mr. Bundy was searching for me all over Washington. His office got into touch with the Indian Embassy and my hotel and various other likely places but I was not to be found anywhere. They then got into touch with Senator Cooper's office, where it was known that the Senator had made an appointment for me that morning with Congressman Freling Huysen, a Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. That was where Mr. Bundy ultimately reached me. It was nearly 12 noon. Mr. Bundy said he was sorry that he could not give me longer notice; he had reported to the President the substance of our conversation and the President felt he could not let me go away without seeing him; the President was giving a lunch to the King of Morocco at 1 o'clock; he was free till then; if I came down to the White House straightaway the President would be delighted to see me.

The President said he had heard a lot about the debates I had been having with the Senators and Congressmen; a few days earlier he had had to go to Costa Rica for the installation of the new President of that country; he had with him on the plane to Costa Rica a number of the senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; they had told him a good deal about the talks I had with them about the India-China situation. The President wanted to know what impressions I had gathered. I told the President that while everybody showed great kindness to me I was puzzled by the position taken by the leading politicians, Democrats as well as Republicans, and also the leaders of the Administration. I did not understand the American unwillingness to raise substantially India's military strength (bits and pieces of military equipment were another matter) so as to offer effective resistance to Communist China. I ventured to point out that Mr. Kennedy's predecessor, a Republican President, had offered to Mr. Nehru on a plate, only a few years earlier, what we were trying quite unsuccessfully to get from the U.S. Government after the Chinese invasion.

When President Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles made the military pact with Pakistan the President had said entirely

on his own initiative to Mr. Nehru that for every weapon he gave Pakistan he offered India three. Would Mr. Nehru accept? The President had added at that time that he did not want any assurances from Mr. Nehru that these weapons would not be used by India against Pakistan, because he knew Mr. Nehru well enough to know that Mr. Nehru would never do such a thing. But at that time Mr. Nehru rejected the offer with contempt because the acceptance of such military equipment would do serious damage to his policy of non-alignment. Since then both the Indians and the Americans had travelled a long way; we could not get by persuasion what could be had a few years ago from our American friends without asking.

The President said he saw my point. But it was not possible, in terms of American politics, for him to do what I was asking. He jokingly added that the trouble between India and the United States were the two K's, Kashmir and Krishna Menon. (There was at that time much talk in the world about the two K's, Kennedy and Khrushchev.) I said that I did not understand the logic of the American argument that the United States could not get too deeply involved in the raising of India's military power to deal with the situation created by Communist China until there was a Kashmir settlement between India and Pakistan. I pleaded that whatever military assistance the President decided to give or not to give India to resist China was a question that should be settled on its merits; I did not see its connexion with the settlement or absence of a settlement of the Kashmir problem which had remained an unsolved international problem for the past sixteen years.

The President said he did not ask for an immediate settlement of the Kashmir problem. He agreed that it was perhaps more complicated than the Americans realized and he also agreed that his Ambassador, Professor Galbraith, was wrong in putting pressure on the Indian Government immediately after the Chinese invasion to find a quick solution of the Kashmir problem. 'But it is one thing to find a final solution of the Kashmir problem; it is another thing to take a position, a position that appears reasonable to your friends in the world, if not to your critics. Your Prime Minister's position appears

unreasonable to all those who have consistently supported him over the years. You can forget Pakistan.'

So I asked the President if he would very kindly help me to understand what sort of position Mr. Nehru could take which would be considered reasonable by the President and our other friends in the world. He replied that he had attempted at an earlier date to send Mr. Eugene Black, a proven friend of India as well as Pakistan, out to the subcontinent to act as a mediator in the Kashmir dispute but he was sorry that Mr. Nehru rejected the idea; but at that time Mr. Krishna Menon was at the height of his influence; now that he was out of power, Mr. Nehru might be more receptive; the President was going to try his hand at it once again; he was planning to send Secretary Rusk at an early date to New Delhi. The President wanted me to persuade Mr. Nehru to accept the idea of mediation. A mediator after all was not a judge; his job was merely to get the two parties together, so that they could talk for weeks and months until they tumbled on a solution that might be acceptable to them both. He mentioned the role played by Ambassador Bunker as the U.N. mediator in the Dutch-Indonesian dispute over West Irian.

What the President added was significant: 'I can understand your Prime Minister's difficulty. Up there in the barren mountains of Ladakh he is confronted with the power of Communist China. To deal with that situation he wants the United States to raise India's military strength substantially. You point out that we are virtually saying that the United States will not do it until there is a Kashmir settlement. And if a Kashmir settlement means that Mr. Nehru has to hand over the Kashmir Valley to Pakistan, then I would, as a politician, if I were in his shoes, give up those barren mountains and keep the lush valley. I would not give up the valley for the sake of those barren mountains.' It was quite clear to me that the President never wanted India to lose the Kashmir Valley as a result of a Kashmir settlement.

Then I asked the President if he would help me to understand his remark about the other K. He said very briefly that it was not for him to say whom the Prime Minister of a

sovereign State should or should not appoint as a Minister; but the Senators and Congressmen of both parties with whom I had talked at length had a big question mark in their minds about Mr. Krishna Menon. It was well known that Mr. Krishna Menon's position was that India's enemy No. 1 was Pakistan, not China. If Mr. Nehru brought Mr. Krishna Menon back to power, which was not impossible, then what use would he make of India's increased military power? American politicians, rightly or wrongly, had grave misgivings in their minds about it.

It was at this stage that I ventured to tell the President that I was impressed to see the extraordinary identity of interest between the Russians and the Americans in the India-China situation. Both were saying in almost identical words and phrases that a repetition of the Chinese invasion was a very remote contingency and India should not get excited. Since it was not possible for the President to raise India's military strength in the way I advocated, could he not consider the possibility of some purely non-military diplomatic action in the shape of a joint U.S.-Soviet statement to reduce the India-China conflict into a border dispute; perhaps an international commission could thereafter go into the details of the border dispute. Even if such a joint U.S.-Soviet statement was nothing more than the expression of a concern and a sentiment in favour of a peaceful settlement the fact that the two super-powers together did it was bound to make an impact on the world. The President thought that there was something in what I suggested and promised to have a good look at my suggestion.

Since the President was so frank and warm in his replies, I shared with him Mr. Nehru's letter to me, dated 5th January 1963, on the problem posed by the military power of Communist China. The President read it slowly and carefully and ruefully remarked: 'He cannot sacrifice non-alignment, eh? Are the people of India non-aligned between Communist China and the United States? I don't believe that anybody in India is non-aligned between China and the United States—except of course the Communists and their fellow travellers.' Then something fell from his lips which was perhaps unintentional. He indignantly said that only a few months earlier when Mr.

Nehru was overwhelmed by the power of Communist China he made a desperate appeal to him for air protection and, non-alignment or no non-alignment, the President had to respond. He added sarcastically that Mr. Nehru's conversion lasted only a few days. He was impressed to see the speed with which the Prime Minister swung back to his original position with regard to the United States.

I also showed the President the last testament of Sri Aurobindo (see Plate 5) written on 11th November 1950:

'The basic significance of Mao's Tibetan adventure is to advance China's frontiers right down to India and stand poised there to strike at the right moment and with right strategy, unless India precipitately declares herself on the side of the Communist bloc. But to go over to Mao and Stalin in order to avert their wrath is not in any sense a saving gesture. It is a gesture spelling the utmost ruin to all our ideals and aspirations. The gesture that can save is to take a firm line with China, denounce openly her nefarious intentions, stand without reservation by the USA and make every possible arrangement consonant with our self-respect to facilitate an American intervention in our favour and what is of still greater moment, an American prevention of Mao's evil designs on India. Militarily, China is almost ten times as strong as we are, but India as the spearhead of an American defence of democracy can easily halt Mao's mechanized millions. And the hour is upon us of constituting ourselves such a spearhead and saving not only our own dear country but also South-East Asia whose bulwark we are. We must burn it into our minds that the primary motive of Mao's attack on Tibet is to threaten India as soon as possible.'

Since the President did not know who Sri Aurobindo was I explained to him briefly that Sri Aurobindo was born the son of an anglicized Bengali who wanted his son to be trained like an Englishman. He was thus sent, at the age of seven, to school in England under the care of a British missionary friend. The bright boy won a scholarship to a public school, St. Paul's in London, and found his way to Cambridge, as a Foundation scholar in King's College, where he did, of all things, the Classical Tripos—very unusual for an Indian. He took a First in the Classical Tripos in 1892. When he returned from Cambridge

to India, at the age of twenty-one, to teach in a college in Baroda he did not know a word of his mother tongue, Bengali, or any other Indian language. So he learnt, one by one, all the Indian languages and the great classic, Sanskrit, and if one sees merely his written works of scholarship on the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, his poems and literary works, written in superb English, one finds the range of it astonishing. But this was mere scholarship and intellectual achievement. After a period as the leader of a violent revolutionary movement in Bengal, in the first decade of this century, to overthrow British rule in India, he saw the futility of violence and retired to the French enclave, Pondicherry, where he lived continuously from 1910 to 1950. For the last twenty-four years of his life he never came out of the house he lived in; his sole occupation was meditation, contemplation and writing. As a result of decades of self-development he acquired a consciousness and a power which was more than mental or intellectual. During his forty years as a yogi in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo rarely intervened in political matters; the only occasion on which he intervened in such matters was in 1942 when Sir Stafford Cripps brought to India, as Mr. Churchill's emissary, the very inadequate British proposal of giving India independence after the war as the basis for India Britain co-operation in the war, which was rejected by both Gandhiji and Mr. Nehru. Sri Aurobindo pleaded at that time in a message to Gandhiji and Mr. Nehru that the unsatisfactory proposal brought by this Englishman should not be rejected because he could see that (a) the British and their allies (those were the dark days of the war for the British) were going to win the war; and (b) after the war the British were going voluntarily to leave India without the Indian leaders having to do anything more about it.

The President read the words of Sri Aurobindo's last testament several times over and said: 'Surely there is a typing mistake here. The date must have been 1960, not 1950. You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation, sitting in one corner of India, said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?' I pointed out to the President that Sri Aurobindo passed away in

December 1950. He was somewhat shocked. 'So there you are,' said the President. 'One great Indian, Nehru, showed you the path of non-alignment between China and America, and another great Indian, Aurobindo, showed you another way of survival. The choice is up to the people of India.'

So the President got up to go to lunch to entertain his royal guest, the King of Morocco, and I handed to him a present I had brought for him from India—three books of Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *War and Self-determination*. 'Come and see me again when you are next in Washington', said the President as he opened the door of his study for me.

I sent Mr. Nehru three written reports from Washington on the marathon talks I had with American politicians about the India-China problem and India's need for military equipment.

To these Senator John Sherman Cooper, a steadfast friend of India and of Mr. Nehru who took me under his wing during these Washington talks, added his own report in the following letter:

*United States Senate  
Washington, D.C.  
March 30, 1963*

*His Excellency Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru  
Prime Minister of India  
New Delhi, India*

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I would like to tell you that we have enjoyed the visit of the Hon. Sudhir Ghosh and that we have been impressed by his representation of India.

In a quiet and patient way, he has been able to make engagements and to talk with many members of the Senate, House of Representatives, the Executive Branch of the Government, and with President Kennedy. While I was glad to help him secure some of his first appointments, those with whom he talked were so impressed with him that they asked other members of the Congress and the Executive Branch to see him. Quite a number requested that he return for longer talks.

I do not know of anyone from any country who has been able



to talk to so many members of the Congress, of the Executive Branch, and persons in other fields.

From my own observations, and from reports given me, I believe he has contributed a great deal to better understanding of India's problems, and to the relations of India and the United States.

I would like you to know that I have thought a great deal about you in recent months, and about problems you and your government face. I believe there is good understanding of these problems in the Congress and in our country, and a desire to be helpful.

My wife joins me in best wishes to you.

With highest regards,

Sincerely yours,

John Sherman Cooper

JSC:pcf

I returned to New Delhi in the middle of April. As soon as I returned Mr. Nehru sent for me. It was a Sunday afternoon when I went to see him at his house. The house looked very empty. He had no other appointment that afternoon. He was relaxed and he gave me some tea and talked in a leisurely manner. 'So you have come back from your Moscow-Washington odyssey? Now tell me all about it.' He was obviously eager to hear every detail of all that the American President said. I ventured to tell him that the trouble between the American President and him was not non-alignment, or any matter of policy. I told him how, non-alignment or no non-alignment, the President felt he had to act when Mr. Nehru had asked for air protection after the Chinese came down to the Brahmaputra Valley.

I reported to Mr. Nehru that I was told by one of the closest associates of President Kennedy that the President had two items of secret sorrow; the very first day he became President he talked in his moving Inauguration Speech about the 'soaring idealism of Jawaharlal Nehru' and the 'steadfastness of Charles de Gaulle'; it was his ambition to get really close to these two great men; he failed miserably in both cases, in spite of all his efforts. I repeated to Mr. Nehru an account of his visit to

President Kennedy in November 1961 which was given to me by one of the President's close friends and how the visit ended in a disaster. This friend of the President told me how Mr. Kennedy was excited like a schoolboy about the Nehru visit and how he and his wife used to spend hours discussing the small details of the arrangements for the eminent visitor, the menu for his meals, the people who should be invited to meet him, the people who should not be invited because he might not like them and so on. The President of the United States never bothered about such things before the visit of any other foreign dignitary. At the end of it all the President felt puzzled and rebuffed because the Prime Minister just refused to open up.

'You are so charming to so many people. Why couldn't you show some kindness and warmth to this man? He is young enough to be your son,' I pleaded with Mr. Nehru. 'Surely you did not expect me to embrace him, did you?' said Mr. Nehru rather glumly. 'There is no misunderstanding between him and me, as far as I know,' he added. That was a typical Nehru reaction. But this time I was persistent and pinpointed what I was driving at. 'No, Sir, I did not expect you to embrace him,' I replied. 'But the absence of misunderstanding is not the same thing as understanding. He was so eager to come to an understanding, as between two human beings. I think he genuinely believed that if Jawaharlal Nehru and John Kennedy really got together they could, between the two of them, change the world. I think what bothers the Americans is not non-alignment or any matter of policy. You remember when you went to Soviet Russia, the Russians gave you a very warm welcome. I think they meant it. It was not mere flattery. After your triumphal tour when you left the U.S.S.R. you said at the Moscow airport, entirely on your own initiative, that you were leaving behind in that country a part of your own heart. On your way home from Washington a bunch of brash American reporters met you at the Cairo Airport and asked you how you got on with their new President. You said rather peevishly, "I can get on with anybody in this world." And this was splashed in the newspapers all over the United States. I gathered that the President felt very hurt. That is the sort of thing that

stands between you and the Americans. It has nothing to do with your policy of non-alignment. My own impression is that you think the Americans are barbarians, in the Greek sense.'

This time what I said went home. He became very silent, Then the bigness of the real man came out. He smiled and said, 'Well, you remember I said the same thing in China, too, that I was leaving behind in that country a part of my own heart. Now look what has happened!' So I laughed. And he laughed and said, 'Have some more of these Pakoras; they are rather nice.' So I ate some more Pakoras and drank my fourth cup of weak tea and took leave of him.

The President did send Secretary Rusk to New Delhi in the first week of May 1963 to try to come to an understanding with Mr. Nehru about a mediator in the Kashmir conflict. This time the Americans were touched by the warmth of the treatment they received from Mr. Nehru. Since I had acted as the unofficial go-between I had the honour of being called in for the first time for consultations by the senior officials. My wife and I were asked to dinner at the Prime Minister's House to help entertain the American guests. The British Commonwealth Secretary, Mr. Duncan Sandys, who insisted on having a finger in the pie was a bit of a problem; but Ambassador Galbraith who was intellectually head and shoulders above the whole lot of them kept the Commonwealth Secretary under firm control. The Americans went away very happy because Mr. Nehru reacted favourably to their proposal of mediation in the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir, which he had rejected at an earlier date when President Kennedy offered the services of Mr. Eugene Black as mediator.

Ambassador Galbraith, who always used the minimum number of words to express his feelings, was rather touched by my persistence and wrote this brief letter on what was going on:

*New Delhi, India  
May 7, 1963*

Dear Sudhir:

Many thanks for letting me see the interchange with Bundy. I am once again a little encouraged by the way things are

moving and it is clear that everyone owes a great deal to your patient, persistent and highly intelligent efforts.

I look forward to seeing you in the next few days.

Yours faithfully,

John Kenneth Galbraith

*Shri Sudhir Ghosh, M.P.,  
95 South Avenue,  
New Delhi*

A vigorous search was made during May, June and July of 1963 for a mediator in the Kashmir dispute. Various names were discussed. The name of Lord Mountbatten was suggested at one stage but the Pakistan Government would not touch him with a barge-pole because he was reputed to be a friend of India. The name of Ambassador Bunker was talked about. This was more of a possibility. But it was not easy to find a man acceptable to both sides. While the search was going on Mr. Nehru unexpectedly made a speech in our Parliament in August 1963 withdrawing everything he had ever offered to Pakistan as a gesture. I was then at Clarens near Geneva on my way to Washington. I was invited as a consultant to an international seminar of diplomats organized by the British and American Quakers. That was where I read the report of Mr. Nehru's statement in the newspaper.

Mr. Nehru had approved of a second visit by me to Washington to see if the idea of some joint U.S.-Soviet action for peace between India and China was feasible. The Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed in July and it encouraged me to hope that the next joint action by the two super powers for world peace might be the U.S.-Soviet declaration on the India-China conflict about which I had made a suggestion earlier in March to the U.S. President. In Washington I had a full discussion with Secretary Rusk on 4th September. The Secretary of State was very friendly and affable and said that he was going to 'mull it over' but there was no indication of any concrete action in the India-China situation. I soon discovered that Mr. Nehru's statement in Parliament unilaterally cancelling the idea of mediation in the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir

had upset the President. He had expected that Mr. Nehru would at least consult him before withdrawing something which, according to the understanding of U.S. Secretary of State, as the Secretary told me on 4th September, was a commitment. This was the end of any possible Nehru-Kennedy co-operation in international politics.

On my return to India I pointed out to Mr. Nehru that perhaps the unilateral cancellation of the idea of mediation was unwise. He told me that it was no use trying anything more with Pakistan because it had become clear that Pakistan had no intention of making a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir problem—except on her own terms. He had received intelligence reports about the activities of Chinese Communist military instructors in East Pakistan and in that part of Kashmir which was occupied by Pakistan; they were organizing the Vietcong type of guerrilla training of Pakistanis on a large scale. This was the beginning of the ultimate invasion of the Kashmir Valley by thousands of the so-called armed infiltrators which actually took place, two years later, in August 1965. Pakistan was also supplying arms to Nagaland to create trouble for India, and what our American friends call 'flirtations between Pakistan and Communist China' had reached a point when it was useless doing anything more about mediation between India and Pakistan. I saw the force of Mr. Nehru's argument. I told him, however, that I only wished he had written a personal letter to President Kennedy before making a public statement in Parliament.

After that time the prospect of a peaceful settlement between India and Pakistan of the Kashmir dispute became more and more dim. There was nothing that men of goodwill could do in that situation. It seemed so hopeless. I, however, tried my hand at it once again in March-April 1964, a few weeks before Mr. Nehru's death. I got his clearance to go to Moscow and Washington for a third time to see if some joint U.S.-Soviet action in the India-Pakistan situation was possible. In the India-China situation it was not difficult for the U.S. President to participate in some joint U.S.-Soviet endeavour for peace but it was difficult for Mr. Khrushchev. For it would have become

another brick that the Chinese could throw at the Russians. In the India-Pakistan situation, however, it was easier for Soviet Russia to be interested in some joint U.S.-Soviet effort for peace. For Russia had consistently supported the Indian position in the Kashmir dispute. But it was difficult for the U.S. Government to join hands with the Soviet Government. For, after all, Pakistan was a military ally of the United States. However, as an act of faith I undertook this third part of my Moscow-Washington odyssey. On 13th March I flew from Delhi to Moscow along with the Indian Ambassador to Moscow whose hospitality I enjoyed every time I visited that city. I shall always be in his debt for the friendly interest he took in my persistent unofficial efforts to get the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to act together in the search for peace.

Of the series of talks I had in Moscow the most interesting one was an interview with Mr. Firyubin, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister to whom I handed this draft of a possible U.S.-Soviet joint statement on the India-Pakistan situation on 18th March 1964:

‘The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A.—Being desirous of reducing tensions, step by step, in all parts of the world, and with a view to maintaining and strengthening peace throughout the world,

‘Have agreed to issue the following joint statement:

‘The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. feel concerned about the tense situation existing between India and Pakistan. The peoples of India and Pakistan have for centuries been neighbours with strong cultural, racial and other friendly ties. It was unfortunate that relations between them should have become strained after Independence. It is regrettable that large scale migrations of minority communities should have taken place. In the larger interest of the peoples of India and Pakistan, and in the interests of peace in Asia and the world, it is necessary and desirable for these two great countries to create an atmosphere of peace and friendship and conditions for a peaceful settlement of all differences, including the question of refugees, the situation in Kashmir, and other problems, which may pose a threat to their peaceful and friendly relations.

‘The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. appeal to the Governments of India and Pakistan to take steps towards this end and to

enter into direct negotiations after a peaceful atmosphere is created so as to resolve these differences peacefully and amicably.

'The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. will be glad to associate themselves with and to guarantee any peaceful settlement that is arrived at between the Governments of India and Pakistan directly or through any other means acceptable to them both.

'The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. hope that this assurance will help remove the existing mistrust in the minds of India or Pakistan and help them to speed up the peaceful solution of their existing differences.

'The Governments of U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. sincerely hope that India and Pakistan will never resort to the use of force in settling these differences.'

An officer of the Indian Embassy in Moscow kept a careful record of all that was said by Mr. Firyubin and me in the ninety-minute dialogue. On Kashmir Mr. Firyubin said that it was the Soviet Government's belief that the Anglo-Americans did not wish to see the end of the Kashmir dispute, for them the unsolved problem of Kashmir was an instrument which they were using for purposes of their diplomacy in South and South East Asia. And he thought that it was rather naïve of me to expect the United States Government to participate in a joint statement such as this. Mr. Firyubin said that the Soviet Government consistently supported India's position and there had been no change in that policy. Mr. Khrushchev himself had said that the Soviet Government would continue to pursue this policy. The Soviet Government had no doubt whatsoever in their minds and he added: 'You should have none either.' The American position on the Kashmir issue was, however, just the opposite. The Americans supported Pakistan, their ally, a member of the S.E.A.T.O. and C.E.N.T.O. blocs. Mr. Firyubin, however, did not wish to discourage me but he was sure that the Americans were not going to support this proposal of a joint U.S.-Soviet statement.

In Washington I found an unexpected degree of support from the principal politicians in favour of the proposed U.S.-Soviet joint statement on the India-Pakistan situation. Senator Mundt, Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee, took the initiative to write to Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Committee, on 11th April 1964, enclosing a copy of the draft of the proposed joint statement and urging the Chairman to arrange for a discussion with Secretary Rusk when the Secretary appeared next before the Committee. Two of the other members of the Committee offered to take it up with President Johnson. I sent a cable to Mr. Nehru through the Indian Embassy in Washington to say that the Senators did not see any reason why the President of the United States could not sign such a joint statement and that their support of the proposal was much more than I had expected. I gathered, however, that the opposition from the officials of the State Department to the draft was stubborn. They did not want a U.S.-Soviet statement; they wanted the same thing to be put out as the 'consensus' of the U.N. Security Council. That was an effective way of killing the idea. To this day I remain convinced that there would have been no war between India and Pakistan in September 1965 if our American friends agreed to sign the joint U.S.-Soviet statement.

The disastrous war between India and Pakistan, in September 1965, which did grievous damage to both the countries has settled nothing except one question; it has been conclusively proved to the United States, to Britain and to Pakistan itself that Kashmir cannot be taken from India by the force of arms. If Pakistan succeeded in taking Kashmir from India by the force of arms I do not believe that the U.S. Government or the British Government would have shed many tears over it. But today they are subdued over Kashmir. The American folly of giving arms to Pakistan which were used against India for the purposes of Communist China has been forced into the open. There is growing realization on the part of the Soviet Union, the United States as well as India that the crux of the whole situation is the power of Communist China and how to contain that power. I summed up this situation, as I saw it, in a letter I ventured to write, after the India-Pakistan war of September 1965, to my good friend, the American Vice-President, Mr. Hubert Humphrey:



*95 South Avenue  
New Delhi  
25 September 1965*

*His Excellency Hubert H. Humphrey  
Vice-President of the United States  
Washington D.C.*

Dear Hubert,

I ventured to write to you last February about the state of India-America relations and you were kind enough to send me a reply in March. You were evidently advised by your advisers that India-America relations had never been better. Since then many things have happened between India and the United States; in particular the use of the American Patton tanks and other American military equipment by Pakistan against India, first in Kutch and lately in Punjab, in the fratricidal war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, has created a vast sea of bitterness and anger that divides India and the United States today. I think you know me well enough to know that these days are for me days of sorrow.

You will recollect that when I came to see you last year in April I begged you to ask the Administration to consider the possibility of participating in a joint statement with the U.S.S.R. Government on the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir which threatened this part of the world with a serious conflagration. The enclosed copy of the draft joint statement which I presented to you and the copy of a letter from our mutual friend, Senator Mundt, to the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will remind you about it. On my way to Washington I stopped in Moscow and there I discussed with some of the Soviet leaders the draft of the proposed joint declaration. I also left with you a note on the discussion that took place between me and these Russian friends who warned me that my American friends would never sign such a declaration, because there were far too many men in the American State Department who made a career of the cold war. Sure enough they were right. My friends amongst the U.S. Senators reacted rather warmly to it. Senator Mundt requested

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to take this matter up with Secretary Rusk. You will recollect that Senator Cooper who spoke to you about this matter was eager to go with you to President Johnson to urge him to consider the suggestion. I left Washington before I knew what came out of this meeting with the President. But I was distressed to notice that the opposition of the officials of your State Department was stubborn. It is my conviction that if the U.S. Government agreed to sign this joint declaration a year ago then there would not have been this war between India and Pakistan.

In the Kashmir issue the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. have all these past years worked against each other and have taken sides, the Russians virtually saying, 'India, right or wrong' and your Government saying, 'An ally is an ally for all that'. Today after all this bloodshed of an India-Pakistan war which almost brought the world to the brink of disaster you and the Soviet Government have been forced by a combination of circumstances to agree to work together in this India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. This is good for the world. But it took a war to bring you round to this point. The disaster has not been, by any means, permanently averted; the evil day has merely been postponed. It is just round the corner. It all depends upon what the Chinese Communists decide to do.

May I venture to point out in this connexion two varieties of naïvety, one American and one Indian, in the current international situation? As recently as the 22nd March 1965 General Strickland and Mr. David Bell, Directors U.S.A.I.D., said in their evidence to a secret session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (which was later published): 'It is our judgment that despite flirtations between the Pakistanis and the Communist Chinese it remains true that the Pakistan Government is a strongly anti-Communist Government and it is valuable to the United States to have some significant military force in Pakistan with which we are in continuous association and which could be used under certain circumstances.' This is the American variety of naïvety, the danger of which your State Department is not likely to see even after the recent disaster.

Then there is the Indian variety of naïvety. We Indians have for long years given moral instructions to the world about peace and co-existence. Today we find ourselves at the receiving end of these moral lectures and we are not enjoying it. The frontier between Communist China and the free world extends from Kashmir to Korea; we Indians are interested to resist China only in that part of the frontier which lies from Kashmir to Assam but not on the rest of it. India's non-aligned position between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. served a great purpose in the past and still serves a purpose today; but we Indians claim, even after the Chinese invasion of 1962, to be non-aligned between Communist China and the United States!

I try from time to time to point out to my friends in our Parliament the Indian variety of naïvety. I hope you will do what you can to cure your colleagues of the American brand of naïvety which I have ventured to point out.

With warm regards,

Yours sincerely,

SUDHIR

(Sudhir Ghosh)

In a letter dated 3rd December 1965 the U.S. Vice-President gave me his comments on what I had said; he was grateful to me for writing so candidly to him. But I was not exactly loved by my own colleagues in the Congress Party in Parliament for pointing out to my own countrymen the Indian part of this magnificent folly. On 15th March 1965 I made a brief speech on the Vietnam crisis and the power and the intentions of Communist China, in our Parliament, in the course of which I quoted the following prophetic words of the saint and seer, Sri Aurobindo, which he wrote on 28th June 1950, on the Korean situation, in reply to a question put to him by a disciple:

'I do not know why you want a line of thought to be indicated to you for your guidance in the affair of Korea. There the whole affair is as plain as a pikestaff. It is the first move in the Communist plan of campaign to dominate and take possession

first of these Northern parts and then of South East Asia as a preliminary to their manœuvres with regard to the rest of the continent—in passing Tibet as a gate into India.

‘If they succeed, there is no reason why domination of the whole world should not follow by steps until they are ready to deal with America. Truman seems to have understood the situation if we can judge from his moves in Korea, but it is to be seen whether he is strong enough to carry the matter through. The measures he has taken are likely to be incomplete and unsuccessful, since they do not include any actual military intervention except on sea and in the air. One thing is certain, that is, if there is too much shilly-shallying and if America gives up now her defence of Korea she may be driven to yield position after position until it is too late. At one point or another she will have to stand and face the necessity of drastic action even if it leads to war.’

Communist China did about Tibet what exactly the seer had predicted and did pass Tibet as a gate into India in the invasion of 1962. China did withdraw from the Brahmaputra Valley of her own accord. But the military reality is such that China can invade India again at a point of her own choosing and at a time of her own choosing. I said in the course of my speech that with this Sword of Damocles hanging over the head of India it was not enough for India to tell the United States to get out of Vietnam. I was just as anxious as anybody else to see the Americans getting out of Vietnam but it seemed to me that the only responsible way to get the Americans out of Vietnam would be for India and other non-aligned countries to try and gather together an international force, under the banner of the United Nations, consisting of the Afro-Asian and the non-aligned, leaving out the great powers. If such a force moved in and the Americans moved out there would be a situation in which Communist China could be prevented from swallowing Vietnam and the Vietnamese, North and South, would get a chance to decide their own future. I went on to say that while I believed in India’s non-alignment between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. I did not understand how India could be non-aligned between China and the United States. Even the father

of non-alignment asked for American air protection when we were overwhelmed by the power of Communist China in October-November 1962 and the President of the United States did respond and order one of the American aircraft carriers to proceed to the Bay of Bengal.

I knew that my remark was likely to cause some controversy. But to my surprise it let loose a political storm of extraordinary ferocity which raged in the lobbies of Parliament and in the Press for a couple of weeks. This controversy became front page news for days together in the principal newspapers all over India and editorial articles, such as this one written by the Editor of the *Indian Express* on 24th March 1965, appeared in most of the newspapers:

‘Poor Mr. Sudhir Ghosh who has undertaken quite a few official and unofficial missions in his lifetime, has been badly mauled twice in the course of a week. Angry demands for his expulsion from the Congress Party were made on March 15 and 22 for daring to speak in Parliament the truth about the desperate appeal for help made by Mr. Nehru to Mr. Kennedy when India lay open to a serious invasion by the Chinese. To his further mortification, Mr. Sudhir Ghosh was contradicted by the Prime Minister on March 22, though he was saved the humiliation of being called a liar.

‘Where Mr. Sudhir Ghosh went wrong, of course, was over his details. The Prime Minister could, therefore, rightly claim that Mr. Nehru had neither asked for a U.S. aircraft carrier nor was there one present in Indian waters at the height of the Chinese aggression. The reference to “air protection” was also easily explained by the reminder that India had asked for assistance from more than one quarter. With obvious discretion Mr. Sudhir Ghosh decided to absent himself from the Rajya Sabha when he was being contradicted by the Prime Minister. His apparent intention was not so much to save himself from popular displeasure as to make the way clear for the leader to defend the Government.

‘But the substance of what Mr. Sudhir Ghosh said on March 15 cannot be challenged. On November 19, 1962, Mr. Nehru did send to Mr. Kennedy an urgent request for help, and the communication was delivered by the Indian Ambassador in Washington. This was not a request in general terms but a specific appeal for assistance. Even the number of operational air squadrons was mentioned,

presumably in consultation with the Services Chiefs in New Delhi. Mr. Kennedy responded immediately. The U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Pacific were alerted. Perhaps a carrier or two was also set on the move because the Americans were not content with giving lip sympathy alone.

'That is how Mr. Sudhir Ghosh seems to have got the aircraft carrier story. Unfortunately he did not make a reasonable calculation about the time it would have taken a U.S. carrier to move into Indian waters from its previous position. Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri, was, therefore, correct in saying that a U.S. carrier was nowhere near Calcutta. Since Mr. Nehru also did not ask for a carrier but defence help in the air, Mr. Shastri was also right in denying that Mr. Nehru ever made a request for a carrier. It was for the Americans to decide how the aircraft squadrons were to travel to India.

'Another fact on which Mr. Sudhir Ghosh was almost correct was the effect which the U.S. response to Mr. Nehru's request had on the Chinese. This is what he said in the course of his speech in the Rajya Sabha on March 15: "One great Power knows how to give a signal to another great Power, and it is not widely known that a signal was given by one side to the other that, if they advanced any further, they would be forcing the hands of the President of the United States." It so happens that the "signal" to which Mr. Ghosh referred was not given directly by Washington to Peking but through a powerful medium. That medium, it is believed, was the Government of the U.S.S.R. It will be recalled that there was an interval of only about two days between Mr. Nehru's message to Mr. Kennedy and the Chinese "unilateral" declaration of a ceasefire.

'There is no doubt that Mr. Sudhir Ghosh's explosive statement in the Rajya Sabha on March 15 took the Government in New Delhi by surprise. The original communication from Mr. Nehru to Mr. Kennedy dated November 19, 1962, is in the archives of the State Department in Washington. It is difficult to believe that a copy does not exist in the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi. But the file copy, if any, in the Prime Minister's Secretariat had apparently not been seen by Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri. The Ministry of External Affairs was also presumably unaware of its existence.

'It is possible that Mr. Shastri did not take immediate notice of Mr. Sudhir Ghosh's remarks. He was, however pressed by certain Members of Parliament (including presumably members of his own party) to clarify the situation. It was thus that a search began for Mr. Nehru's communication. The Americans were naturally

anxious not to embarrass the Government of India by saying anything on their own. The U.S. Embassy may have subsequently helped by assuring the Ministry of External Affairs that the document in question did exist. The Prime Minister, therefore, cannot be blamed for having taken a whole week in facing Parliament with a reply.

'But, to reflect now in cool dispassion, why was all the fuss necessary over the remarks made by Mr. Sudhir Ghosh? Was it because, in the past 30 months, we have forgotten the real peril in which India was placed in the third week of November, 1962? Or is it because, after the immediate danger was over, we could again indulge in the virgin chastity of academic non-alignment? It is surprising, indeed shocking, that the great pandits of our foreign policy should engage themselves in the old game of splitting hairs over the precise definition of "air protection". It would do these gentlemen a lot of good to recall those terrible days of November, 1962, when the plains of Assam lay open to Chinese plunder, and to remember that the country's one desire at that time was to be saved, all chaste talk of non-alignment notwithstanding.

'In any case, if Mr. Nehru asked for massive assistance, from whatever quarter, in the hour of the nation's danger, he only did the right thing. Brave champions of non-alignment would not have thanked the late Prime Minister if he had allowed the country to go under only because help from a friendly Power did not fit in with "policy". It goes to Mr. Nehru's credit that, in spite of the help he asked for and received, he did not align India with the U.S.A. It is time some of the belly-aching politicians in our midst began to face the facts of life. Unfortunately, because of a few obvious inaccuracies, Mr. Sudhir Ghosh's thesis was completely lost in a futile controversy.

'The following two sentences of his speech in the Rajya Sabha deserve to be repeated: "In the hour of our danger, so proud a man as our former Prime Minister realized that, in the last analysis, it was not a practical proposition to defend India from the military might of Communist China without using the military might of the United States. That was the background of the Prime Minister's famous remark that there was going to be no non-alignment where China was concerned." Let the defenders of the late Prime Minister's foreign policy chew these words carefully instead of playing to the tune of the Communist Party whose great leaders would not have turned a hair if the Soviet Union had offered in November, 1962,

military assistance identical with the response made by the late President Kennedy.'

How could so good a man as Mr. Nehru do such a dirty thing as to ask for American air protection?—was the angry question asked in and outside Parliament House by the Communists and the fellow travellers in our Congress Party and a number of other people who had no connexion with the communists.

In that hour of peril, when India was overwhelmed by the power of Communist China and the Chinese broke through our military stronghold at Towang, and the supposedly impregnable passes of Se La and Bomdi La, and came right down to the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, Mr. Nehru took the only right action that a responsible statesman could or should have taken in that situation. He loved India more than anything else in the world and when India was in mortal danger he was prepared to throw away anything, including his favourite policy of non-alignment, for the sake of India's survival. His action showed that he was above everything else a great patriot. What I had said was obviously true and was meant to be a compliment to Mr. Nehru's patriotism and statesmanship. But the upheaval it caused was a significant political phenomenon, nationally and internationally.

For four days Prime Minister Shastri withstood all pressure on him to make a statement contradicting me but on 19th March he sent for me. As I walked into his office in Parliament House I found the second Minister of the Government, Mr. Nanda, as well as the Foreign Secretary already there. The Prime Minister said he was puzzled by my statement that Mr. Nehru had made a special request to President Kennedy for American air protection; he knew that I was not the kind of person who would make an irresponsible statement and yet the Foreign Secretary had reported to him that there was nothing on record to show that Panditji did such a thing; he as well as Mr. Nanda were both ministers in Mr. Nehru's Cabinet at the time but neither of them knew anything about it. Had I made a mistake? Was I talking about the omnibus letter that Mr. Nehru had addressed to heads of all friendly



Governments, on 20th October 1962 asking for assistance from wherever it was available.

I explained that it was something quite different. It was a very special communication addressed to the President of the United States on 19th November 1962 and I had heard about it from President Kennedy when I saw him in March 1963 and what I had heard I had reported to Mr. Nehru himself. If my report was incorrect Mr. Nehru would have flared up. Prime Minister Shastri who honestly did not know anything about it was surprised. I advised him not to make a statement without ascertaining the facts which the Foreign Secretary could easily get from the American Ambassador and if after investigation he was in a position to tell me that my statement was incorrect I would make a public apology to Parliament and to the country for my mistake.

Thus he waited for three more days to make his investigation and discovered that Mr. Nehru had retained the document in the Prime Minister's Secretariat and did not allow it to go to the Foreign Office. But evidently the pressure on Mr. Shastri was so powerful that he felt that he had to make a statement. What he said in Parliament was neither untrue nor true. He said that his predecessor did not ask for an American aircraft carrier (which was true because the request was for American air protection) and that there was no American aircraft carrier at that time in the Bay of Bengal (which was also true because it was on its way to the Bay of Bengal). It was like the oft-repeated Indian story of the battle of Kurukshatra in the Mahabharata in which the Pandavas played a trick on the great warrior Dronacharya by making the announcement that Ashwathama (his son) was killed in battle, but it was an elephant called Ashwathama; the latter part of the announcement was drowned in a great din that the Pandavas deliberately made; Dronacharya heard the first half of the announcement and was tricked into believing that his son Ashwathama was killed and in grief desisted from fighting; and thus the Pandavas won the war.

To set the record straight I wrote to the Prime Minister on 26th March 1965:

*95 South Avenue  
New Delhi  
26 March 1965*

My dear Shastriji,

Last Friday morning (19th March) you called me to your office in Parliament House. It was a characteristic act of kindness on your part to talk to me before making a statement about something I had said. I was much moved by your courtesy and kindness. You told me that neither you nor Nandaji (who was present at the discussion) knew anything about any special request made by Panditji to the American Government for air protection after the Chinese invasion in 1962 and that people around you had told you that my statement was incorrect. I offered to make a public apology if after enquiring from Ambassador Bowles you were satisfied that Panditji did not make such a special request for air protection to President Kennedy at that hour of our peril, apart from the omnibus letter he had written to all heads of governments. Nandaji supported my suggestion that Mr. C. S. Jha (who was present) should find out from the American Ambassador whether such an official document containing Panditji's appeal for air protection existed in the possession of the American Government. You decided not to make a statement on Friday, as you had planned to do, and to postpone it till Monday, the 22nd March. It was also decided that in the meantime Mr. C. S. Jha was to make the necessary enquiry.

On Sunday evening, 21st March, I met Mr. C. S. Jha and asked him what he had gathered from Ambassador Bowles; because I had promised to make an apology the next morning, if I was wrong. He said he had not seen Mr. Bowles but he had had a talk with 'the Americans'; it was obvious that he did not wish to tell me frankly what he had found out. So I got into touch with Ambassador Bowles who informed me through his Private Secretary, that he had sent Mr. Douglas Heck, Counsellor of the Embassy, to Mr. C. S. Jha on Saturday; Mr. C. S. Jha had asked Mr. Heck a plain question and Mr. Heck gave him a plain answer that the U.S. Government did have the document (Panditji's appeal to President Kennedy

for air protection); the document was in Washington and it could be produced if the Government of India so desired. I went to your office on Monday morning to ask you what you would like me to do in these circumstances but you did not see me. Sardar Swaran Singh and Mr. C. S. Jha were with you at the time. Since you did not see me the only sensible thing I could do was to be absent from the House when you made the statement because I could not say anything that conflicted with what my Leader said.

The statement you made before Parliament was technically correct; Panditji did not ask for an aircraft carrier (my information was that he asked for air protection which was much more than an aircraft carrier; in his letter of appeal to Mr. Kennedy 16 squadrons of fighting aircraft presumably manned by Americans, were mentioned); you were also correct in saying that no aircraft carrier was there in the Bay of Bengal at that time (Mr. Bowles says the aircraft carrier was ordered to proceed to the Bay of Bengal from the Indian Ocean and was on its way). All this makes no difference to the substance of what I said.

Looking back I see that I made an error of judgement; I could easily have made my point about the insanity of the policy of non-alignment with regard to China without telling the story about the wretched aircraft carrier. The thesis of my speech had nothing to do with any aircraft carrier. I made a brief speech on the crisis created by the power of Communist China in South East Asia and the crisis in the United Nations and I pointed out the inadequacy of our policy in both these grave situations. Our policy of non-alignment between Russia and America is correct and wise but—whatever may be the clumsiness and crudity of the Americans—I believe that our policy of non-alignment as between China and America is a dangerous game to play; we are unwittingly playing up to the communists in India and in China. I believe that by bringing this grave matter sharply to the notice of the people of India I have done a service to the country.

The essence of my speech was that, in the last analysis, it was not a practical proposition to defend India from the mili-

tary might of Communist China without using the military power of the United States. Even Panditji, the apostle of non-alignment, realized this in the hour of our peril in 1962 and asked for American air intervention and, God forbid, if we are attacked again we shall have to ask for the same thing from the same Americans. Panditji did what any responsible statesman would have done; it only proves that he was a great patriot. It is silly of anybody to say that by telling this plain truth I have damaged the 'image' of a great man or cast a slur on the fair name of India.

Panditji did make a special appeal for air protection which was delivered by Ambassador B. K. Nehru to President Kennedy late at night on the 19th November, 1962. It is not a great secret of Government. It is public knowledge. It has already been written about (vide the *Washington Post*, 22nd February 1963—the article on this subject by Selig Harrison). Harrison tells me that he got it directly from Ambassador Galbraith who told quite a few people in New Delhi about it. You personally did not know about it at the time. But Ambassador B. K. Nehru is just now in New Delhi. I request that in the interest of truth you ascertain the facts from him. I want to know from you the truth about this matter because I have to decide if I owe an apology to the Party and to the Country.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

SUDHIR GHOSH

*Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri,  
Prime Minister*

In his reply dated 31st March 1965 Prime Minister Shastri said that he had merely given a clarification to Parliament and that should be the end of the matter. So I kept my mouth shut.

The curious part of this interesting incident of international diplomacy was that the U.S. State Department came out with an official statement that Prime Minister Shastri was quite correct; Mr. Nehru did not ask for an American aircraft carrier and there was no American aircraft carrier in the Bay of Bengal. In view of this statement the following exchange

between Secretary Rusk and Senator Mundt, on 26th March 1966, in a public hearing on the 1966 Foreign Aid Bill (p. 68) is interesting:

#### MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO INDIA IN 1962

*Senator Mundt:* 'Let me ask you what happened back in 1962 when India had some pretty rough going, as I recall, with the Red Chinese when they were attacking her borders. At that time we provided some direct military assistance, did we not?'

*Secretary Rusk:* 'Yes; we and Britain joined to provide certain assistance to India at that time.'

*Senator Mundt:* 'Nehru was then the leader, was he not?'

*Secretary Rusk:* 'That is correct.'

*Senator Mundt:* 'Did Nehru ask the United States, through an appeal to President Kennedy at that time, for air protection?'

*Secretary Rusk:* 'There was some discussion of that at that time, Sir.'

*Senator Mundt:* 'That is very evasive, Mr. Secretary.'

*Secretary Rusk:* 'I beg your pardon?'

*Senator Mundt:* 'That was evasive. Either Nehru asked for air protection or he did not.'

*Secretary Rusk:* 'Senator, we are in open session, I could go into closed session. It is not proper for me to go into communications with chiefs of government on matters of that sort in open session.'

The subsequent cross-examination of the Secretary of State by the Senator clearly established that India did ask for air protection and the U.S. did respond to the request.\* One sympathizes with the Secretary of State when he says that it is not proper for him to reveal confidential exchanges between heads of two Governments. But it seems that the Secretary's sense of propriety did not prevent him from entering into an internal Indian controversy, a difference between the leader of the Indian Congress Party in Parliament and one of the members of that party; evidently he considered it proper to authorize the issue of a statement putting out a deliberately misleading half-truth.

While this fierce controversy was raging I unexpectedly got a

\* The aircraft carrier story was repeated by the U.S. Ambassador, Mr. Bowles, on 10th June 1966 at a meeting of Indian Army, Navy and Air Force officers in South India.

letter from Mr. Rajagopalachari with whom I had not been in touch for many years:

*60 Bazlullah Road  
Tyagarajanagar  
Madras-17  
31st March 1965*

My dear Sudhir Ghosh,

A friend has sent me a great part of your speech on March 15 in the Rajya Sabha. I congratulate you on the speech. I don't understand the uproar raised against your statement about Mr. Nehru which really is a compliment to him and not anything derogatory. It is amusing to see that your praise has been dealt with as if it were something uncomplimentary that you said.

Yours sincerely,

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

I wrote to Rajaji and said that the behaviour of our American friends in this whole matter left a bad taste in the mouth. The wise man wrote back to say:

*60 Bazlullah Road  
Tyagarajanagar  
Madras-17  
9th April 65*

My dear Sudhir Ghosh,

I have your letter of April 6 and enclosure. I would advise you not to take the attitude of our American friends to heart. People have not been misled by their attitude. People in general support you and they will continue to do so.

Best wishes as always.

Yours sincerely,

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

I was much touched by the two little notes from this elder statesman. He is the only one left of the Gandhian days. There was something Gandhi-like in these few brief words. The thought that he had sensed my desolation and had written on

his own initiative brought tears to my eyes. It reminded me of a shrivelled up little fruit I have carried in my pocket for last twenty years as I have moved to the ends of the earth—to North and South America, Europe and Russia, South East Asia and Japan.

Gandhiji had an extraordinary capacity to crack jokes in the midst of his desolation. Back in the winter of 1946, during one of my visits to the remote villages of Noakhali in East Bengal where he was walking from village to village to give hope and courage to men and women who were frightened by communal violence, I found him staying all alone in the thatched hut of a village washerman. All his companions had been sent away to other parts of the district on the same mission of mercy. The washerman's hut and the frail old man in it was a picture of desolation.

The day I left him on my way back to Delhi he walked with me a short distance from the washerman's hut. Then he stopped under a tree. The tree, a Hartuki tree (*myrobalum*), had shed numberless fruits and the earth was strewn with them. Talking to him under that tree I had a feeling that this was perhaps the last meeting with him. As I bent low to touch his feet a few of my tears fell on his feet. So he said, 'Now, that sort of thing is not allowed', and picked up one of these silly little fruits and put it into my hand and playfully said, 'This is my mark. Keep it in your pocket and run along.' Then he administered his customary slap on my back to bid me good-bye. The propulsion of that resounding slap on the back has kept me going for twenty years. I have kept up my struggle as an emissary. I do not seem to have achieved many successes. But outer successes and failures are irrelevant. I keep trying. In moments of weakness when I have wondered if all this struggle has been worthwhile the shrivelled up little fruit reminds me of that slap on the back. So I keep going, and in moments of isolation I get comfort from repeating to myself Sri Aurobindo's message: 'When thou hast the command care only to fulfil it. The rest is God's will and arrangement which men call chance and luck and fortune.'

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